

## TESTIMONY

The New York City  
Council Committee on  
Governmental Operations

Francisco Cabrera, Chair  
Tuesday, February 23, 2021  
Remote Hearing

Note: This testimony reflects  
the position of Pratt Center for  
Community Development and  
not Pratt Institute.

### Comprehensive Planning for a more just, resilient NYC Re: Intro-2186

I am Adam Friedman, Director of the Pratt Center for Community Development, and I thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of the proposed legislation. The city desperately needs a fair and inclusive process for ensuring that it can meet the extraordinary challenges of climate change, of racial and economic inequality, and the sheer complexity of running a city of 9 million people.

But our current process is nowhere close to meeting the challenge, instead it is an assortment of siloed structures that cloud decision-making and often result in plans that have a disparate and tremendously unfair impact on communities of color.

Pratt Center has advocated for equitable comprehensive planning that encourages and resources community-based plans and participation for decades. So, we appreciate what a significant milestone the proposed legislation and this Council's hearing are today.

A city facing the accelerating effects of climate change needs a process that aims squarely at equity and resilience if it is serious about achieving those goals. Its process must make sure the city remains functional, and that all people, especially the historically and currently underserved, have the basic essentials of life – that our housing plans align with our transportation and infrastructure, with school construction and open space, and that all public policy objectives advance racial justice.

In addition to the chorus of community voices from low-income neighborhoods who have voiced the failures of the current system, I offer three examples where the failure to comprehensively plan endanger the future of our city:

1. This past year the Mayor hailed the local production of personal protective equipment, particularly the masks and isolation gowns produced in the Garment Center, as having been essential to the City's response to Covid19. But this production capacity will be lost once the market recovers and production space is converted as now allowed by a recent zoning change that did not value or anticipate the need for that production space.
2. The recent rezoning of Jerome Avenue, which displaced a cluster of small, largely-Immigrant owned auto businesses, was the 4th cluster of auto businesses that has been rezoned, and whether you like cars or not, cities need functions like auto repair.
3. Several years after Super Storm Sandy in 2012, I was on a City/State task force that examined our food supply. Environmental justice advocates and climate scientists pointed out that if the storm had hit a few hours later, it would have hit Hunts Point. That would have been devastating for the residents of that low-income community of color and there would have been weeks if not months of chaos for the city's food supply had that happened.

#### Who in city government thinks about these issues and how they overlap?

The proposed legislation does an outstanding job of laying out a process that can center equity and resilience, and of honoring community-based planning while addressing the tremendous challenges our city faces. Like all proposals, there are areas where it could be further strengthened. Two potential revisions are:

1. Strengthening the reality of community-based planning through direct resources to local entities as well as those for engagement and technical assistance:
  - to ensure that the proposal lives up to its promise to strengthen and amplify local voices in both setting citywide goals and making local plans, neighborhood and communities who are currently marginalized in planning processes must be explicitly prioritized.
  - the Long-Term Planning Steering Committee, and other relevant bodies should reflect the diversity of the population at both citywide and neighborhood levels by incorporating representatives from community, racial justice, and environmental justice organizations, and ensuring representation for NYCHA residents, homeless New Yorkers, and other frequently marginalized peoples.

2. Centering environmental justice and climate resiliency in comprehensive planning analysis and targets. This would be facilitated by the inclusion of a climate resilience road map that includes a risk assessment of physical, social, and ecological vulnerability, and equitable strategies for climate risk reduction that is supported by capital planning.

Finally, there may be some sentiment that comprehensive planning seems antithetical to the nature of New York City, a city of spontaneity which is essential to innovation and creativity.

The truth, however, is that this innovation and spontaneity depend on diversity of place and function and maintaining that diversity will require more intervention and new planning tools, not less. The city needs to create the conditions that make it ripe for innovation, and then New Yorkers can do what they do best, combine an extraordinary diversity of talents and perspectives to build a new, equitable and resilient future.

We look forward to working with the City Council led by Speaker Johnson, the Administration, and community-based partners across the city to discuss the details of the proposal in greater detail and to make such a process a reality.

For more information, contact:

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