

Summary of Comments from Community Leader Meetings

From January 18th to January 30th, the Mayor’s Office of Long-Term Planning and Sustainability conducted 6 community leader meetings in the Bronx, Brooklyn, Queens, Staten Island, Upper Manhattan and Lower Manhattan. We invited 885 community leaders and over 300 attended the meetings. The purpose of these meetings was to both inform these leaders about PLANYC and to receive their feedback on the Mayor’s “10 Goals for 2030.” Their suggestions and comments were collected during small-group discussion sessions.

The following summary of the meeting comments are divided by each of the ten goals. The comments have been categorized by themes, listed in order of most popular to fewest comments.

HOUSING

Goal: Create homes for almost a million more New Yorkers, while making housing more affordable and sustainable

Maintain and Promote Affordable and Mixed Income Housing

There was strong support throughout all boroughs for maintaining and promoting affordable and mixed-income housing. Suggested tactics for preserving and increasing such housing included: incentivize developers, redefine/re-evaluate the term “affordable” and related housing guidelines, integrate affordable or mixed-use units in regular housing, preserve existing affordable housing, continue the 80-20 split, initiate “true” 421-A reform, increase rent regulations and provide public funding in the form of government financing, investment, or permanent cross-subsidies. Individual suggestions included: study best practices from other cities, educate public to reduce misinformed opposition to affordable housing, build more low/mid-income condos, and use “special zoning to preserve artists housing and low income.” General individual comments emphasized that “affordable housing” should include middle-income housing, senior housing, and should still be of high quality.

Other suggestions focused on government support to promote home ownership, by creating ownership programs for refurbished abandoned housing, converting some city housing to ownership units, giving renters an option to buy, or providing ownership assistance to low/mid-income renters.

Community Involvement , Neighborhood Character/Quality, Social Infrastructure
Numerous community leaders expressed the sentiment that rezoning should not affect the character of their neighborhood and asked for “more community based planning,” including specific requests for immigrant community involvement, community benefit agreements, more information sharing within the community, and “fewer big box developments” to “save mom and pop stores and ‘homey’ communities.” Numerous requests were made to include and increase “social infrastructure” in construction planning, including open community space, hospitals/healthcare, and education and after-school programs.

City Agencies and Policies

There were numerous calls for improving city agency performance, efficiency and responsiveness (e.g., DOB). Specific suggestions included: improve inter-agency coordination, expedite permitting, increase HPD/DOB inspections staff, reduce bureaucracy, and engage in more regional planning. Staten Island leaders expressed frustration that their land use study “has been ongoing for 50 years.”

Suggested Housing Locations

Community leaders suggested the following opportunities or locations for housing development: existing or abandoned industrial/residential buildings, remediated brownfields, Sunnyside Yards (Queens), and Seaview Hospital (Staten Island).

Green Buildings

Community leaders support an increase in “energy-efficient”, “sustainable and long-lived” green buildings and green roofs, particularly for new construction. Individually suggested tactics include: require all new developments to be green, change building codes to encourage sustainability, expedite permits for green buildings, and implement educational campaign and incentives for green building.

Zoning

Community leaders in Queens and Brooklyn called for comprehensive and continued re-evaluation of zoning in their neighborhoods. Other individual comments suggested zoning to restrict parking, require open space, encourage mixed-use developments, prevent displacement of current residents, disallow high rise buildings, establish new commercial hubs outside Manhattan, increase land use, and promote industry (job generation) along with affordable housing.

Miscellaneous

There were multiple suggestions for “more transit-oriented development”, encouraging higher density housing, more modular housing, and “reasonably sized dwellings (so as to accommodate real furniture)”. Individual suggestions included: increase tax on unused land, redefine construction standards, provide set-asides for current population and preserve and invest existing stock.

CONGESTION

Goal: Improve travel times by adding transit capacity for millions more residents, visitors, and workers

Improve and Encourage Use of Mass Transit Options

- Incentives and Infrastructure Improvements: Shared ideas for mass transit improvements included make mass transit more affordable with reduced fares and tax incentives and build more park and ride facilities. Individual suggestions included integrating MetroCard in every transit mode, upgrading to modern equipment,

updating subway signal system, implementing GPS in buses, and improving two-mode commuting.

- **Specific Transit Types:** There was widespread support for increasing the number, frequency and quality of all forms of mass transit, including those for underserved areas. Comments addressing improvement and increased availability of specific transit types included: ferries, bus, subway, light rail, electric trolley, and train. Several leaders asked that the city open, restore and improve the LIRR.
- **Geographic Areas and Specific Transit Lines:** “Outer boroughs feel neglected”: Numerous calls to build more transit options within and between the outer boroughs. Many also asked the city to improve and increase transit access to airports through Airtrain and subway connections, and to provide more cross-town transportation/subways.

Each borough provided suggestions for specific solutions or transit lines (spanning all transit modes) needing attention in their neighborhoods. Miscellaneous comments included: “Make parks accessible by public transport” and “more senior citizen-friendly.”

Limit Parking and Discourage Car Use

Community leaders from virtually all boroughs recommended the implementation of congestion pricing and earmarking the money for transit improvements. Several suggested discouraging car use by limiting the availability or increasing the cost of parking. Ideas included: reduce/eliminate/charge for government employee parking, implement resident-only permits, increase parking prices, enforce parking regulations, and reduce parking requirements for developers.

Other ideas for discouraging car use included: Implement the commuter tax, encourage telecommuting, increase bridge tolls, penalize employers for employees who commute by car, “establish no-car zones in high density areas”, and give “disincentives to drivers, use the smoking ban as a guide.”

Improved Roads and Driving

Several individual suggestions were made for improved road design to ease congestion, including: reduce auto lanes, “build an offshore expressway to bypass city center,” “expand outer borough ‘thru’ streets,” among others. Additional groups suggestions included improving enforcement of traffic rules and providing “more driver info during peak hours on highways.”

Four specific suggestions were made: to move the police plaza out of lower Manhattan (“it’s a parking nightmare”), add a second level to the Flatbush Avenue Conduit, convert the Staten Island Expressway bus lane to a High-Occupancy Vehicle (HOV) lane, and enforce SI Expressway bus lane rules.

While one group commented that “double-decker highways should be a last resort,” two groups suggested that abandoned or updated elevated lines/tracks could be used to expand the transit system.

Increase Biking and Walking

There is widespread support to “make all of NYC ‘bikable,’” and community leaders suggested that the city become more bike and pedestrian friendly by expanding the relevant amenities and infrastructure, such as bike parking, “permanent bike paths,” and “pedestrian boulevards.”

Freight/Commercial Traffic

Suggestions for ameliorating the role of congestion played by freight/commercial traffic included: promote use of barges and rail for cargo movement and mandate night-time/off-peak cargo delivery.

Miscellaneous

Individual suggestions for this goal included: distribute economic centers, think and plan regionally, educate people about shortcomings of car traffic and highways, and minimize big box stores (“that generate a lot of traffic”). A comment to provide incentives for low emissions vehicles should be applied to Goal 7 (Climate Change) and Goal 8 (Air Quality).

PARKS

Goal: Ensure that all New Yorkers live within a 10-minute walk of a park

Specific Ideas for Park Venues

Many of the suggestions to “use wasted space innovatively for parks” specifically referred to “more green roofs,” “rooftop gardens,” or “public roof parks” above existing structures. Other shared suggestions included: remediated brownfields, community gardens, reclaimed or developed waterfront property, and schoolyards. Individual ideas for conversion to parks included: abandoned piers, abandoned armories into youth centers, green spaces surrounding public institutions, “bluebelts” throughout the city, “corridor parks,” “pocket parks,” and landfill expansion. Specific locations raised for park development were above the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway, Hyland Park reservoir, St. Saviour’s park, and Penn. Ave landfill.

Improving the Park System

Different suggestions were offered to improve the park system, including: greater maintenance and cleanliness (“new parks should have dedicated maintenance funding before they are built”), community involvement and partnerships in park planning, better park accessibility, more incentives for public parks, and “no more synthetic turf.” One group commented that “parkland area per person, i.e. density” should replace the “ten minute walk” metric.

Require or Incentivize Developers to Build Parks

Several community groups emphasized the role that developers should play in building public, open, green spaces to offset high rise development. Specific suggestions were made to also encourage property owners to green their property or to pay private owners who open their yards to the public.

“Green Our Streets”

Community leaders called for greener streets by planting more trees, developing more “greenways,” and “more gardens on building setbacks,” with a comment to “create ‘greenstreet’ areas big enough for activity (not just in the median).”

WATER NETWORK

Goal: Develop critical back-up systems for our aging water network to ensure long-term reliability

Improve Water Infrastructure and Administration

Community leaders encouraged the city to add more water tunnels, “update water metering technology” and “establish distributed micro-metering,” and “rectify water pressure problems,” and “prevent CSO.” In terms of administration, individual suggestions included: “create a deputy mayor for infrastructure - must be a technical person,” “ensure best-qualified professionals are operating new infrastructure,” and “establish preventative maintenance programs.”

Sustainable Alternatives

Community leaders encouraged the use or exploration of alternatives to conventional potable water sources, including desalinated water, and, for non-potable water uses, rainwater, greywater, and groundwater.

Protect Our Water Sources

Several comments related to the protection of New York’s water sources to ensure long-term supply and quality, with particular mentions of the upstate watershed, reservoirs, Brooklyn/Queens aquifer, Hempstead Lake and suggestions to “return paved over areas to green areas.”

Promote Conservation and Efficiency

Many community leaders supported efforts to promote water conservation and efficiency by encouraging/requiring use of high efficiency fixtures, increasing water fees, enforcing billing rules, and expanding conservation education programs.

STATE OF GOOD REPAIR

Goal: Reach a full “state of good repair” on New York City’s roads, subways, and rails for the first time in history

Lessen Road Damage by Reducing Traffic

There was an emphasis on lessening the damage caused by trucks. Individual suggestions included: enforce truck routes and weight rules, divert freight to rail or marine transport, and “no through truck traffic.” Suggestions were also made to reduce car traffic by improving mass transit options.

Increase Funding, Improve Maintenance

Community leaders stressed the need for greater investment in preventative maintenance, more cost-effective repairs, “extended maintenance years on all city capital project contracts,” more long-lasting construction methods, and a specific need to find alternatives to road salting. Funding ideas for repair and infrastructure included:

increase the gas tax, implement congestion pricing, advocate for state/federal money, and establish a “city infrastructure” fee (“i.e. an impact fee”) to be paid by developers.

Improve City Agency Performance and Coordination

A variety of comments addressed the need to improve agency performance, from “complete overhaul of NYCTA” to “get NYC to control the MTA.” A few groups called for more inter-agency communication to lessen street disruption during repairs or maintenance. Innovative individual suggestions included: “initiate a ‘Marshall Plan’ for transportation,” “increase ‘contract for performance’ style management,” and “give community boards greater impact.”

ENERGY

Goal: Provide cleaner, more reliable power for every New Yorker by upgrading our energy infrastructure

Increase Sustainable Energy Alternatives: Renewable Energy, Distributed Generation
Community leaders showed tremendous support for the city’s diversification to sustainable energy alternatives, with specific reference to distributed generation in general, solar, waste conversion to power, wind, tidal, cogeneration, and geothermal. Ideas provided to effect or encourage such diversification included: implement net metering and smart metering programs, provide incentives or establish DG requirements to developers/consumers, and amend zoning laws and building codes.

Promote Energy Conservation and Efficiency

Leaders throughout the boroughs supported energy conservation and efficiency programs, with specific references to promote green building (“encourage green housing as a means to reduce electricity consumption”), high efficiency “retail technology” and appliance standards, and “more public education and outreach for conservation”. A suggestion was made to “turn off lights in office buildings at night.”

Improve Existing Power Infrastructure/Administration

With regards to the existing power infrastructure, several suggestions were made to upgrade the power grid and to retrofit, re-power, or retire existing power plants. Individual considerations raised included: “don’t build anymore power plants near residential areas,” “don’t forget environmental justice and health concerns when building new plants,” “work with state to reduce in-city power generation requirements,” “increase recycling programs,” and “advocate for electric public transport and cars.”

CLIMATE CHANGE

Goal: Reduce global warming emissions by more than 30%

Reduce Vehicular Emissions

Community leaders from four boroughs provided numerous ideas for reducing vehicular emissions by lessening “overall car usage in NYC.” Ideas echoed those expressed for

Goal 2 (Improve Travel Times), including more bike infrastructure, “end free parking in Manhattan,” and congestion pricing. In addition, several ideas were provided for minimizing vehicular emissions through the promotion of lower-emissions vehicles (such as “small cars,” hybrid vehicles, electric buses or other vehicles using bio-fuels) and the establishment/enforcement of emissions regulations.

Reduce Emissions from Other Sources

Regarding other sources of greenhouse gas emissions, community leaders highlighted cleaner industries, improved waste handling/recycling performance, more efficient green buildings, and cleaner energy sources. Several suggestions were made to establish more incentives or regulations to “cap industrial emissions” and “encourage green industries in NYC.” Individual comments were made to lessen consumer impact on greenhouse gas emissions by encouraging shopping bag re-use and taxing plastic goods.

Other Policy Support

Policy suggestions included: establish or participate in carbon markets, plant more trees, push for federal policy change, increase regional cooperation, increase public education, and “equitably distribute benefits throughout all initiatives.”

AIR QUALITY

Goal: Achieve the cleanest air of any big city in America

Decreasing Emissions and Pollutants Caused by Transportation Modes

Community leaders provided numerous suggestions for decreasing emissions and pollutants from personal and freight transportation modes. Numerous comments were directed at reducing car use with tactics such as congestion pricing, increased gas tax and parking fees, incentives for hybrids and surcharge for SUVs, “car-free streets and districts (on weekends),” and “discourage city employees from driving, no free parking.” With respect to commercial traffic and freight transport, there were several suggestions for truck/freight emissions reductions, enforcement of idling rules, and promotion of modes other than trucks (e.g., rail, ferry) to move freight. Many comments also expressed continued support for mass transit usage as well as cleaner fuel and engines for city buses.

Groups from the Bronx, Brooklyn and Lower Manhattan also addressed highway construction issues, which varied from “stop building highways” to suggestions regarding specific highways such as “deck over the BQE” or “charge tolls on Cross Bx Expressway to reduce emissions.”

Individual notes were made to “separate bike and vehicle lanes” and to “ban recreational helicopters.”

Plant More Trees

Outer borough leaders shared the sentiment to “plant trees everywhere.” Specific, individual suggestions included: “do a tree census,” “more green roofs,” and “better maintenance of existing trees.”

Address Asthma Issues

Several community groups raised the need to address asthma concerns. Individual suggestions included: address “existing and future asthma risk in EIS process,” solve childhood asthma problems, create tougher asthma standards, and clean up rat and roach problem.

Miscellaneous

Community groups in Lower Manhattan encouraged the use of wind energy and biofuels as cleaner energy sources. Bronx community groups added that environmental laws should be enforced to reduce pollution, schools and hospitals should not be sited near pollution sources (e.g., highways), and improved air quality monitoring should lead to greater resources and focus on the most polluted areas.

BROWNFIELDS

Goal: Clean up all contaminated land in New York City

Use of Remediated Brownfields and Prevention of Future Contamination

Community leaders offered several suggestions for the use of remediated brownfields, including housing, parkland and general community use/ownership. Many comments also recognized the need to prevent further contamination, including a suggestion to “eliminate toxic chemicals in existing industries in NYC.”

Administrative Improvements

A variety of administrative recommendations were raised to improve the city’s efforts to prevent and clean contaminated land, ranging from the most general (“reform the BOA program” or “create a localized version of Superfund Site program”) to more specific suggestions regarding liability issues, new or improved cleaning standards or regulations, and tax credits/financing for brownfield cleanup and redevelopment.

Community Involvement and Education

Bronx community leaders also stressed the need for greater community involvement and partnership in identifying contaminated land, planning land use, and assessing “cumulative impact on community.” Leaders from Lower Manhattan and Queens raised the need to educate the public about brownfields, as well as to educate developers regarding brownfield development.

WATER QUALITY

Goal: Open 90% of our waterways for recreation by reducing water pollution and preserving our natural areas

Enhance Waterfront and Ferry Access

Several suggestions were made to prioritize waterfront development and to improve public access to waterfronts and waterways. Bronx and Brooklyn community leaders asked for increased ferry service and routes. Bronx leaders encouraged the city to “partner with communities to identify best opportunities.”

Reduce Stormwater Runoff and Pollution

Community groups offered several suggestions to address the important issue of reducing stormwater runoff, including use of green building techniques such as green roofs and tree planting, or using more permeable pavement or unpaved open spaces. Specific comments referred to the need for more stringent dumping laws and to the fact that “SI beaches are littered, jetties are disintegrating.” A unique suggestion for addressing problems involved choosing “green techniques and organic methods, e.g., dragonflies to eat mosquitoes.”

Improve Sewage System

Community leaders expressed great concern for the city's sewage system, with numerous calls to address Combined Sewer Overflows (CSOs). Several groups also raised the need to significantly "upgrade sewage plants," including specific references to sewage issues in Queens (Jamaica Bay) and Staten Island.