

Summary of Comments from PLANYC Website

From December 12, 2006 to March 27, 2007, the Mayor's Office of Long-Term Planning and Sustainability solicited comments through the PLANYC website from the general public. The purpose of the interactive PLANYC website was to both inform New Yorkers about PLANYC and to receive their feedback on the Mayor's "10 Goals for 2030." Their suggestions and comments were collected and each was read by at least 3 members of the PLANYC staff. The following summary of what we heard are divided by each of the ten goals.

HOUSING

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

This goal received the third-highest number of comments and the ideas presented here represent a great diversity of conclusions and perspectives. Many comments suggest building solely low-density, single-family homes, while many others suggest increasing the density of the outer boroughs and constructing high-rise housing. Comments provide varied suggestions for how, what, and where to build new housing in the city. Some comments express some dissatisfaction with the overall purpose of this goal, suggesting that the city should focus on preventing future population increases, that additional New Yorkers will make the congestion problem worse, and that the goals should focus more specifically on ensuring high-quality jobs and schools.

Many comments address the issue of *where* additional housing should be built. Many of these suggestions emphasize the redevelopment potential of existing or abandoned buildings, or identify the outer boroughs as the most likely site for additional housing. For specific siting suggestions, comments suggest placing housing in now-abandoned buildings, above commercial areas, in industrial sections of the city, above highways and parking facilities, along the waterfront, near public transit, and above schools and libraries. To identify priority housing sites, some comments recommend a comprehensive housing survey or re-zoning initiative to identify potential housing sites and prioritize development.

Comments are less homogeneous about *what* particular structures and housing types should be constructed. A plurality of these comments, however, suggest that higher-density housing projects will be necessary given the city's land constraints. Specific suggestions for housing types include traditional responses such as affordable housing, mixed-income housing, middle-class buildings, and low-income co-ops. Comments also suggest more innovative approaches, such as dedicated senior-citizens' housing, mandates to ensure that new housing projects conform to environmentally responsible and sustainable building designs, and zoning changes to permit cooperative housing. Several comments suggest that new housing projects must respect the local context of their neighborhoods.

To promote housing development, comments most frequently encourage the continuation or strengthening of affordable housing programs, including rent control and rent stabilization,

expanded housing subsidies for tenants, and tax breaks for affordable-housing developers. Several comments express dislike for rent control and rent stabilization approaches, instead suggesting a purely market-based approach. More novel ideas for how to encourage new housing included abolishing large, multi-unit consolidations; investing government pension funds in affordable-housing developments; providing housing subsidies to city employees in lieu of pension contributions; encouraging public-private partnerships for low-income housing; and easing zoning and permitting rules for affordable or green housing projects.

CONGESTION

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

The congestion goal provoked the greatest volume of public comments. There is widespread acknowledgement among the comments that the current system is greatly overloaded and requires some degree of expansion. Comments disagree, however, over what degree and type of expansion will be required. Most comments address particular deficiencies in the current road and public transit system, but some advocate a radical shift in transit priorities such as entirely banning passenger vehicles, constructing a parallel light-rail or monorail system, or building borough “superhighways.” Comments acknowledge the compatibility of the congestion goal with the air quality, climate change, and energy goals.

The greatest number of comments broadly address the improvement or expansion of the subway and rail system to reduce congestion. Many comments suggest the expansion of a particular component of the subway system, such as the Second Avenue Subway, a rail link to LaGuardia, or transit connections to Staten Island and New Jersey. Others suggest reconfigurations of the existing system, such as re-routing existing subway service, extending station platforms, and improving subway signaling and passenger loading technology. Many encourage improved management of the existing system, such as an explicit focus on reducing travel times, improved information about arriving trains, and less disruptive maintenance activities.

Additional comments tend to support the creation of a supplementary transit system in addition to the existing subway system. Many note that this supplementary system should be an interconnected part of the existing transit system. Many suggest creating a Manhattan or Staten Island light-rail, trolley, or monorail system that would reduce both subway and road congestion. Expanded ferries and a modified Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) system are also popular suggestions.

Of the comments directed at road congestion, the vast majority of comments advocate the imposition of a congestion pricing scheme, while only one comment opposes this proposal. Comments suggest that these revenues should be directed toward improving public transit, constructing pedestrian- and bike-friendly streets, and reimbursing outer borough commuters faced with inadequate transit access. Other proposals include increasing bridge tolls, improving bus service, and constructing a dedicated freight tunnel or freight-only rail system. Creating dedicated bike lanes and infrastructure, increasing parking fees, and creating a residential parking permit system are popular responses as well. Several comments suggest the

establishment of a resident parking scheme in some neighborhoods and the revocation of free City parking privileges. Many comments advocate some type of road infrastructure construction, such as a direct tunnel between New Jersey and Long Island, a Staten Island-Manhattan tunnel, and additional Manhattan highways.

Some comments make more broad-scale policy suggestions, such as banning cars in Manhattan, providing tax incentives to use public transit, and making subsidies available to developers that construct bike- and pedestrian-friendly projects. Multiple comments suggest that NYC should move away from a single business district (Manhattan) and toward a more decentralized urban design, thereby eliminating the one-way rush-hour commute.

PARKS

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

This goal clearly resonates with a large number of New Yorkers, many of whom glowingly describe the initiative (“What a wonderful and achievable goal”; “This is a great idea”; “Best idea ever!”). Comments frequently center on specific parks and specific areas that could become parks, particularly the St. Saviour’s property in West Maspeth, Queens and the Atlantic Yards project in Brooklyn. Some comments suggest a tension between this goal and the need for additional housing, but others favorably connect the brownfields and parks goals. Though there is some skepticism within the comments about how feasible this goal is, several comments suggest that the parks goal can be achieved by including playgrounds, greenstreets, and green roofs as parks.

Comments suggest a great variety of options for siting future parks. The most common site suggestions involve placing parks along the waterfront, on abandoned or vacant sites, above expressways and parking lots, along abandoned rail lines, and on brownfield sites. Comments encourage the redevelopment of existing parcels but caution against tearing down historic buildings or ignoring the educational potential provided by parks in historically relevant locations.

Comments also address the specific features these existing and new parks should possess. The greatest number of comments concern the need for improved park management at the same time as additional parks are planned. Many would like to see additional “green” features within parks, including trees and grassy areas rather than concessions and blacktop. Given the tremendous land pressures within NYC, many acknowledge that many small parks and community gardens will be necessary, as well as greenstreets, greenways, and pedestrian-friendly streets. Additionally, many comments suggest the expanded use of green roofs as a substitute or supplement to traditional parks. According to many comments, parks should be fully open to all New Yorkers, many objecting to closed school playgrounds and plans for Randall’s Island. Many suggest that the parks should be treated as “green classrooms” for promoting outdoor education.

Several comments suggested particular methods for accomplishing the overall parks goal. Many express disappointment with the parks allotment within the Atlantic Yards and other EDC proposals. To enhance park acquisition, comments recommend that the City provide tax incentives for land donations to the city, create a public fund to purchase parkland, pass developer incentives or mandates for providing parks or trees, and require Business Improvement Districts to set aside portions of their districts as parkland. Others suggest that the city immediately analyze how well it currently meets the “ten-minute” goal, and determine priority areas for new parks.

WATER NETWORK

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

To a great extent, comments on this goal do not directly address the fundamental infrastructure issues behind the water network challenge. Discussions of water supply, distribution, and use are emphasized far less than water quality issues. Comments for these two goals overlap particularly strongly on the issues of improving public access to the waterfront, expanding ferry transportation, and supporting efforts to restore degraded ecosystems. As a result, few comments specifically address the key purpose of the goal, but instead discuss water quality-related topics.

Several comments emphasize the need to better leverage *existing* city water sources by constructing or repairing tunnels, improving treatment infrastructure and residential piping systems, and enhancing system security. Numerous comments encourage the development of systems designed to better control sewage overflows. Comments suggest encouraging the development of green roofs, water detainment systems, “natural” sewage treatment, and permeable pavements.

Other comments suggest that New York City should identify new water sources, including from upstate (e.g., Niagara Falls), New Jersey, Delaware, and through the construction of desalinization facilities.

Of the remaining relevant comments, many focus on developing more efficient ways of using our existing large-scale water distribution system. Conservation as a policy priority is a frequent theme, as well as the more widespread use of “greywater” systems to reduce the demand for potable water for non-consumptive uses. Comments advocate the toughening of water pollution fines and standards, and a rethinking of the current water rate structure so as to provide clear incentives for conservation.

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

Comments received for this goal address expanding the existing transit system, and how to maintain or improve the system as it currently stands. Many argue that today's subway may not be suitable for New York City in 2030, and are interested in both improving maintenance of today's system and exploring the possibility of system expansion to underserved or congested areas. Several comments express frustration with particular aspects of the subway commute, for example cleanliness, station maintenance, and inadequate connections between subway lines and among different transit options (e.g., LIRR, PATH, and MetroNorth).

As mentioned above, many comments move beyond today's transit system and suggest ways to create a new system. Comments address expanding the subway system to such destinations as La Guardia airport, under-served portions of the outer boroughs, or high-density residential areas. Others suggest the construction of an express bus network, tramways, or light rail. Finally, others believe that additional funding must be devoted to constructing and repairing bridges, tunnels, and highways, and developing improved materials for highway construction and maintenance.

Despite a general focus on new construction, comments seem to suggest that cleanliness, station aesthetics, and rodent control are the greatest maintenance deficiencies within today's subway systems. Many encourage providing subway arrival information and improving on-time performance through improved signals and by running shorter, more frequent trains. Other suggestions include better-maintained elevators and escalators, noise reduction, and improved station ventilation.

Comments describe a general acknowledgement that a full "state of good repair" will require tremendous resource commitments in the decades to come. Though some were skeptical that such dedicated funding could be found, others provide cogent policy suggestions for obtaining maintenance funds. These include diverting funding from congestion pricing, imposing time-varying tolls and subway fares, increasing the city's share of state and federal transit funds, and leasing air rights over subways and roads for additional funding.

ENERGY

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

Comments submitted for this goal provide diverse perspectives on improving energy supply, efficiency, and infrastructure, with particular focus on renewable power, energy efficiency, and energy conservation. Many are pessimistic about the city's ability to markedly improve its energy position without substantial tax incentives or stricter energy ordinances. Proposals in this category frequently overlap with the ideas of those responding to the climate change goal, and many also address the air quality and congestion goals in advocating more efficient vehicles.

Most comments advocate for the implementation of renewable energy technologies. Specific technologies encouraged (and number recommending each) include solar roofs, coastal wind,

building or park-based wind, and tidal or wave power. Other comments encourage the development of distributed fuel cells to provide energy supplies.

On the demand side, many comments center on the promotion of energy efficiency initiatives. These include the development of green roofs, mandatory green building requirements and retrofitting standards, and the creation of decentralized water treatment and rain storage facilities in large buildings. Recommended incentives to encourage this conservation include “smart metering” schemes, methods of creating clear incentives for energy conservation, and the taxation of inefficient consumer products such as incandescent bulbs. Several comments recommended that the city prevent businesses from running air conditioning with their doors open to reduce summer peak energy demand.

A comparatively small number of comments directly address the infrastructure-upgrade component of the goal. Of responses that do, most encourage the adoption of district heating and cooling schemes, decentralized energy generation, and pollution and efficiency improvements to existing power plants, such as promoting cogeneration.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Goal: Reduce global warming emissions by more than 30%

Many comments in this category are qualitatively similar and synergistic with those offered for other goals, especially air quality, congestion, and energy. Nearly all comments are supportive of the overall climate change goal, but some concerns are clear regarding whether NYC can truly make a meaningful difference in the climate realm, and whether a 30% reduction may be too conservative a goal for 2030.

Reducing emissions from the transportation sector represents the largest proportion of comments. Many wish to accomplish the overall goal of reducing traffic through congestion pricing, higher bridge tolls, a citywide carbon tax, promoting carpooling and transit use, and creating incentives and infrastructure for cycling. To reduce emissions of the cars that remain, suggestions include tightening automobile emissions standards and promoting hybrid and alternative-fuel vehicles.

Encouraging efficiency, conservation, and green energy are three consistently voiced goals. Comments present a diverse list of potential targets for new efficiency standards and incentives, such as appliances, insulation, lighting, heating, air conditioning, and thermostats. Incentive comments suggest that the city require electricity prices to change on an hourly basis, conduct energy audits for all property transfers, require efficient lighting on all scaffolding throughout the city, and impose an enhanced sales tax (or ban) on incandescent bulbs. Many encourage incentives for green buildings, stronger energy codes, increased education, enhanced recycling, tree planting, and green roofs. Finally, many support the creation of incentives for renewable energy technologies such as residential and commercial solar, rooftop wind, tidal turbines, and distributed generation. To best promote these activities, comments advocate developing strategic partnerships between government and business, and advertising all available funding sources and opportunities to developers and the public.

Others focused on what the city government itself can do to reduce its carbon emissions. Suggestions include requiring city buildings to meet green building standards, mandating the use of hybrid and alternative-fuel cabs and city vehicles, upgrading city vehicle emissions controls, turning off lights at night, requiring a city renewable portfolio standard, and publicizing the city's own climate change efforts in order to encourage private actions.

AIR QUALITY

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

Comments repeatedly recognize the importance of this goal and suggest diverse policy ideas to address air pollution concerns. Several comments address more than one of the “10 Goals,” particularly the climate change and the congestion goal. Most comments suggest policy options that can be directly achieved at the city level, including retrofits of city vehicles, tree-planting initiatives, and congestion pricing.

Numerous comments encourage air quality improvements through expanding existing urban forestry or “greening” initiatives for purposes of reducing air pollution or decreasing the urban heat island effect. Many combine a tree-planting focus with advocacy for green roofs, frequently concentrating on the heat island impacts rather than specific air quality improvements. To accomplish these broad goals, comments encourage enhancements to the existing DPR Greenstreets program, the creation of additional parkland, and tougher ordinances to require landlords to plant and maintain trees in front of their properties.

Many other comments focus on reducing traffic and/or overall car use in order to accomplish air quality goals. Echoing a dominant recommendation of the congestion goal, many advocate the imposition of a congestion or pollution charge, channeling revenues toward strengthening mass transit systems or subsidizing transit use in underserved neighborhoods. Additional suggestions along this theme include promoting cycling as a transportation alternative, prohibiting traffic at particular times or in particular neighborhoods, and more effectively targeting illegal idling and inefficient delivery-vehicle behavior.

From a transportation angle, many comments propose specific city government initiatives that would help reduce the city's contributions to overall air pollution. Many comments specifically encourage the upgrade or replacement of polluting city vehicles, especially school buses and sanitation trucks. Others encourage the city to promote and require the development of hybrid and hydrogen vehicles and cabs, which could be a gradual process in order to make the transition more feasible. Finally, multiple comments suggest that the city reconsider its own parking permit policies to support additional public transit use, and recommend that the city set its own vehicle efficiency and emissions standards.

BROWNFIELDS

Goal: Clean up all contaminated land in New York City

Although comments for this goal are generally supportive, there were few responses compared to other goals. Some comments address recycling, composting, and trash issues that are not directly relevant to the goal. A few comments address specific brownfield sites of concern.

Comments encourage the redevelopment of existing brownfield sites for future public uses, including new parks, industrial facilities, green manufacturing plants, and schools. Several comments mention the potential for brownfields to provide additional housing for New Yorkers, an idea that reinforces our first goal.

Comments also focus on the issue of brownfields liability, advocating strict enforcement of the “polluter pays” principle and the need to require polluting companies to undertake supplemental remediation projects.

Several comments provide somewhat innovative policy solutions, such as sponsoring a contest to showcase brownfield sites and promote comprehensive redevelopment planning, or using zoning bonuses to spur brownfield redevelopment and encourage more public-centered use of remediated land.

WATER QUALITY

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

Several comments express frustration with past pollution cleanups, including Newtown Creek. Other comments dealing with recycling and waste reduction are less on-topic, but still indirectly contribute to impaired water quality.

Many comments suggest an enhanced focus on opening the waterfront to public access. Several encourage the development of comprehensive greenways along borough coastlines and connections between neighborhoods and waterways. Others support enhanced government action to purchase waterfront property or encourage public waterfront access despite private land ownership.

Many comments urge the implementation of storm water absorption and water conservation measures in order to reduce the load on sewage treatment facilities. Specific suggestions include green roofs, permeable pavement, and dual-flush toilets.

Restoration of rivers and wetlands was a chief suggestion of several comments. By restoring historic waterways in the five boroughs and cultivating wetland areas, they believe, the city can effectively improve water quality, aesthetics, and ecosystem health.