



**Testimony of Brendan Cheney, New York Housing Conference
SoHo / NoHo Neighborhood Plan**

New York City Council
Subcommittee on Zoning and Franchises
November 9, 2021

Good afternoon. My name is Brendan Cheney. I am the director of policy and communications at the New York Housing Conference (NYHC). NYHC is a nonprofit affordable housing policy and advocacy organization. As a broad-based coalition, our mission is to advance City, State and Federal policies and funding to support the development and preservation of decent and affordable housing for *all* New Yorkers.

New York Housing Conference strongly supports the SoHo / NoHo Neighborhood Plan, which, among other changes, would bring desperately-needed affordable housing to the neighborhood. The city is facing an affordable housing crisis and every neighborhood must participate in the solution.

Our housing affordability crisis existed before the pandemic but has been exacerbated by the economic and health effects of Covid. Homelessness continues to be at a crisis point, with more than 77,900 people experiencing homelessness on one night last year.ⁱ Nearly 1 million households in New York City are rent burdened, paying more than 30% of their income on rent, and 460,000 pay more than half their income on rent.ⁱⁱ And by one measure, New York is rated the fourth most segregated city in the country.ⁱⁱⁱ It is an unsustainable situation.

We must add affordable housing in every neighborhood; we cannot continue the trend of relying on lower-cost neighborhoods for affordable housing production. One way to achieve this in higher-cost neighborhoods is through rezonings and inclusionary housing.

The SoHo/NoHo neighborhood currently does not have any income-restricted affordable housing^{iv} while the rezoning would bring a projected 3,200 units^v of new desperately-needed affordable housing to the neighborhood through the mandatory inclusionary housing program.

Asking every neighborhood to be a partner in creating affordable housing and upzoning in high-income neighborhoods has wide appeal – both were recommendations of the United for Housing coalition – a coalition led by NYHC and joined by 90 partner organizations in New York City.

The city is planning something similar with the Gowanus rezoning. These two rezonings would bring affordable housing to two higher-cost neighborhoods, which is a great step in the right direction. We support both plans.

Bringing affordable housing to SoHo/NoHo would also bring diversity to a neighborhood that is predominately white and wealthy. The affordable housing, desperately needed, would also work to reverse and repair our history of racial discrimination. SoHo / NoHo is 77% white and only 2% Black and 6% Hispanic / Latinx.^{vi} The neighborhood is also wealthier than many other neighborhoods in the city; the median income is \$144,508^{vii} and 66% of households make \$100,000 per year or more, a higher rate than the borough and citywide averages. Bringing more affordable housing to this community would help add diversity to the neighborhood and provide new opportunities for families.

While the affordable housing will provide tangible benefits for the people that get the housing, it will also create economic benefits to the community. Housing investment creates jobs and can spur needed economic recovery. Research has found that 100 units of affordable housing construction creates 230 jobs and \$46 million in economic activity, and the city, state and national economy need additional stimulus to recover from the recession.

There is one change we'd like to see in the rezoning. We recommend lowering the proposed allowed commercial FAR to 2.0. We believe that the current high allowable commercial FARs will result in office buildings instead of mixed-income residential. This change would still allow ground floor retail, second floor office space and mixed-use buildings.

As the city's economy struggles to recover, opportunities like the SoHo/NoHo rezoning can create needed affordable housing, unlock new tax revenue, refill the construction pipeline, and help local businesses.

The New York Housing Conference supports this rezoning. Thank you for this opportunity to testify.

ⁱ https://files.hudexchange.info/reports/published/CoC_PopSub_CoC_NY-600-2020_NY_2020.pdf

ⁱⁱ <https://cbcny.org/research/think-your-rent-high>

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/the-avenue/2018/12/17/black-white-segregation-edges-downward-since-2000-census-shows/>

^{iv} <https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/planning/download/pdf/plans-studies/soho-noho/soho-noho-fact-shett-housing.pdf>

^v <https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/planning/download/pdf/plans-studies/soho-noho/soho-noho-qa.pdf?r=b110920>

^{vi} <https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/planning/download/pdf/plans-studies/soho-noho/soho-noho-fact-shet-demographics.pdf>

^{vii} <https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/planning/download/pdf/plans-studies/soho-noho/soho-noho-qa.pdf?r=b110920>