



## **Testimony for Rachel Fee, New York Housing Conference Gowanus Rezoning**

June 3rd, 2021

My name is Rachel Fee. I am Executive Director of 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.

With an enormous need for affordable housing and the urgency of economic recovery, we strongly support the Gowanus rezoning, as long as it includes a dedicated capital commitment for repairs and upgrades dedicated for use at local NYCHA residences Wyckoff Gardens and Gowanus Houses.

As we emerge from the COVID pandemic, New York is facing its worst housing challenges in decades. The homelessness crisis continues to accelerate, as it has under every mayor since Ed Koch. Housing capital repair needs at NYCHA total \$40 billion<sup>1</sup> – a figure that is only growing. Finally, nearly 1 million New Yorkers are rent burdened, paying more than 30% of their income on rent. It is an unsustainable situation.

The pandemic has underscored the importance of housing for the health and safety of every New Yorker. Even though our state has enacted some of the strongest eviction protections in the country, an estimated 1 million renter households are at risk of eviction statewide, collectively owing more than \$2 billion in back rent.<sup>2</sup> Luckily, many of these households will be eligible for federal aid that began distribution this week, but that aid will not fix our underlying problem, which is a dire shortage of affordable housing.

In recognition of the magnitude of our affordable housing crisis, NYHC formed the United for Housing coalition alongside more than partner 90 organizations. Our coalition calls for NYC's next mayor to double investment in affordable and public housing to \$4 billion annually. We also call for each NYC neighborhood to be part of the solution in building and preserving affordable housing to create a more equitable city. And for higher-income neighborhoods, we recognize that it is even more critical to create affordable housing opportunities to confront residential segregation. It is to our collective

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.nbcnewyork.com/news/local/nycha-needs-40-billion-in-extra-capital-new-boss-says/2259520/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/01/nyregion/nyc-eviction-moratorium-shelters.html>

embarrassment that New York is the 4<sup>th</sup> most segregated city in America<sup>3</sup>, and we need to confront the legacy of redlining head-on to better align this city with our values. Zoning policy is an important tool in that fight.

The two adjacent public housing developments should also benefit from this plan with an upfront commitment to needed repairs. Preserving NYCHA is just as important as building new affordable housing. Both preservation of public housing and development of new affordable housing are needed to tackle our city's affordable housing crisis.

The City's actions in the Gowanus Neighborhood Rezoning will map Mandatory Inclusionary Housing throughout much of the rezoning area, requiring that 25% to 30% of residential development be affordable to households making between an average of 60% of AMI to 80% of AMI, or between \$64,440 and \$85,920 for a family of three (in 2021).

While residents in most other major City-led rezoning areas are at least 80% Latinx and/or Black, more than 50% of Gowanus residents are White/non-Hispanic. Gowanus also has a higher median household income than the surrounding borough, unlike most other rezoning areas. Gowanus' median household income is \$106,749 while Brooklyn's median household income is \$62,050. In other words, Gowanus is an ideal neighborhood for creating affordable housing opportunities through residential rezoning.

Investing in housing is needed now more than ever to provide stable housing for New Yorkers. We also know that housing investment can spur economic recovery, as 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.

To meet NYC's affordable housing needs and reduce residential segregation, we need the Gowanus rezoning and for it to be replicated in other neighborhoods. This plan isn't one that was developed overnight or without extensive community consultation. An in-depth and inclusive community planning process was undertaken that produced the Gowanus Neighborhood Rezoning Plan, an opportunity to make significant investments that deliver tangible benefits to the community.

As the city's economy struggles to recover, opportunities like Gowanus 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 and funding for adjacent NYCHA sites.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/the-avenue/2018/12/17/black-white-segregation-edges-downward-since-2000-census-shows/>