



Testimony of Brendan Cheney, New York Housing Conference Gowanus Rezoning

New York City Council
Subcommittee on Zoning and Franchises
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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 Gowanus rezoning, as long as it includes a dedicated capital commitment for repairs and upgrades at local NYCHA residences Wyckoff Gardens and Gowanus Houses.

As we emerge from the COVID pandemic, New York is facing an ever-growing housing crisis. Homelessness continues to accelerate, as it has under every mayor since Ed Koch. Housing capital repair needs at NYCHA total \$40 billion¹ – a figure that is only growing. By one measure, New York is rated as the fourth most segregated city in the country.² Finally, nearly 1 million New Yorkers are rent burdened, paying more than 30% of their income on rent. It is an unsustainable situation.

The city desperately needs more affordable housing and policies that will reverse and repair our history of racial discrimination. Every neighborhood must contribute to the city's affordable housing development, but bringing affordable housing to this neighborhood is particularly important, as it would help make it more economically and racially diverse.

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. Gowanus is therefore an ideal neighborhood for creating affordable housing opportunities in high income neighborhoods through residential rezoning.

These policies – asking every neighborhood to be a partner in creating affordable housing and upzoning in high-income neighborhoods – have wide appeal. Both were

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

² <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/the-avenue/2018/12/17/black-white-segregation-edges-downward-since-2000-census-shows/>

recommendations of the United for Housing coalition – a coalition led by NYHC and joined by 90 partner organizations in New York City.

The Gowanus Neighborhood Rezoning Plan was developed with an in-depth and inclusive community planning process. The 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). The city estimates that this will generate roughly 3,000 units of desperately needed affordable housing.

The community plan also included funding for the two adjacent public housing developments – Gowanus Houses and Wyckoff Gardens. Preserving NYCHA is just as important as building new affordable housing.

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.

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 and the community planning process used here should be replicated in other neighborhoods in the city. Thank you for this opportunity to testify.