



Human Scale NYC





Jane Jacobs at home in the 1950s in a
"blighted" area.

The CITY We Want

We seek a future where the build-out of New York City happens on a human-scale, driven by a true democratic process, with planning for generous parks, light, air, schools, libraries, historic districts, landmarks – all elements of a great public realm reflecting the life and aspirations of an open democracy, and with a strong anti-displacement policy.

A human-scale future is also one where the distinctive character of New York and its diverse neighborhoods is conserved and where unique, small businesses can thrive.



Our Mission

To promote neighborhood livability, democratic control over the built environment, and human scale urbanism by means of public education, policy debate, and advocacy.



POLICY GOALS

GOAL

1

Campaign Finance Reform



- ❖ Survey mayoral candidates on their policy positions and share responses with the public.
- ❖ Advocate for alternative methods of campaign finance that get big money out of politics, e.g: the Seattle democracy voucher system.
- ❖ Advocate for lower contribution limits for donors and lower public financing thresholds for citywide candidates .
- ❖ Advocate for a rule which clarifies that anyone benefiting from a ULURP action or discretionary land-use change cannot contribute to a campaign for three years prior to the start of the land use certification or the issuance of a special permit.

- Advocate for revisions to the City's campaign finance law to remove loopholes regarding bundling and the granting of discretion to City agencies to make opaque judgement calls about who is doing business with the city or not.
- Support a new rule that forbids employees of corporate firms that engage in lobbying from contributing to a campaign beyond the doing business maximum, now at \$400.

GOAL

2

Achieve Height Restrictions that are Human Scale and that Limit Out of Context and Hyper-Scale Development

- ❖ We propose new rules and policies to limit transfers of air and development rights such that supertalls and other 'violence to the skyline' and streetscape ends.
- ❖ An end to the City's efforts to remove state controlled FAR and height caps.
- ❖ Closure of the many zoning code loopholes that allow for excessive height and bulk.
- ❖ Redefinition of contextual zoning to more strictly regulate height and planned expansion of contextual zoning to more neighborhoods.
- ❖ Adoption of shadow law rules for public parkland.



Reform the Zoning Code

GOAL

3

- ❖ Lower the trigger for environmental review to all buildings over 100 feet or ten stories. Revise environmental review to include cumulative analysis of the impact of new density and height on all public assets, including sunlight and viewscales; lower negative impact thresholds and require triggers that force 'back to the drawing board' action and meaningful rather than laughably ineffective 'mitigation.'
- ❖ Enact a substantive demolition tax and a 3-year moratorium on the destruction of buildings built prior to 1946 that have rent-stabilized, or





formerly rent-stabilized units.

- ❖ Enact a permanent 'view tax' on all units/offices of a building that break the cornice line, such tax to be dedicated to fund public space, maintenance of city-owned landmark buildings, and rehabilitation of landmarks held by impoverished non-profits.
- ❖ Lengthen and democratize the land use approval process so that substantive rather than cosmetic changes can occur: end 'done-deal' ULURPs.
- ❖ Eliminate the plaza bonus; edit code to protect and encourage a varied human-scale street wall that favors small-scale and non-chain business: redefine 'contextual' and 'neighborhood character' to go beyond height and mass.
- ❖ Experiment with form-based coding, particularly in low and mid-rise areas; eliminate the multiplicity of special interest carve-outs; stop using zoning to promote phony 'growth' rather than public welfare.

Create a City-Wide Policy Summit to Establish Goldilocks Density

GOAL

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- ❖ Educate the public and the press about density through publications and policy debate.
- ❖ Hold policy summits about what a range for just right “Goldilocks densities” should be and analyze the implications for planning.
- ❖ Collaborate with other civic groups to get City Council sponsorship of such a summit.



GOAL

5

Establish a Human-Scale Affordable Housing Policy



- ❖ Expand rent stabilization to include all units in the city, thereby eliminating the Urstadt law and repealing vacancy decontrol.
- ❖ Transform existing affordable housing funds into a permanent, human scale housing fund that finances human- scale construction for 100% affordable units that are contextual to neighborhoods.
- ❖ Reform regulation to allow- in a safe way - boarding houses, SRO's, group homes, and other dormitory like housing for those at the bottom of the housing ladder.
- ❖ Use city-owned land to build human-scale housing in which all units are permanently affordable.
- ❖ Reform the maintenance system of public housing so that empty units.

are rehabilitated and put back into the usable pool more quickly.

- ❖ Downzone 'gold rush' neighborhoods where the flood of speculative and excessive real estate capital is imposing social costs on the rest of the city.
- ❖ Pass a new 'in-law' zoning amendment that allows 1-2 family homes to create an extra affordable unit on their property without penalty or harassment by city agencies.
- ❖ Develop a 'gentle on neighborhoods' affordable housing policy, to replace the current destructive hyper-density policy.



GOAL

6

Small Business and Manufacturing Policy

- ❖ Pass the Small Business Jobs Survival Act.
- ❖ Initiate comprehensive strategic policy planning among all city agencies to nurture a new generation of small and medium sized manufacturing industries.
- ❖ Overhaul the mission of the Small Business Services agency to focus on policies and regulations that support and sustain small businesses and small manufacturing. SBS is now too centered on supervising and creating undemocratic Business Improvement Districts (BIDs).
- ❖ Shift EDC's focus away from land use for Big Real Estate as the means to economic growth.



Tax Reforms

GOAL

7

- ❖ End tax giveaways and false incentives such as 421a for housing. These have been widely shown to be ineffective.
- ❖ Create a pied-à-terre tax on unoccupied units.
- ❖ Return the commuter tax.
- ❖ Create a more progressive city tax structure overall
- ❖ End corporate tax giveaways for elusive public benefits.
- ❖ Impose a small transfer tax on all units over \$3 million and dedicate the proceeds to fund essential repairs and restoration of landmarked properties owned by churches and other non-profits who cannot afford to maintain their historic buildings.

GOAL

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Democratize BIDS and Community Boards

- ❖ Transform Business Improvement Districts into neighborhood improvement districts that operate on a democratic principle: one-person one-vote model without property requirements for suffrage, as required by New York State's constitution.



- ❖ Have community board members elected rather than appointed. Community boards need to become manifestations of direct neighborhood democracy rather than serve as “political cover” for politicians. The host of naysayers on this are just afraid of real democracy.
- ❖ Impose community board term limits and create stronger conflict of interest rules for community board members.

Respect the Public Realm and Public Assets

GOAL

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- ❖ End the sale, in whole or in part, of public parks, public greenspaces, so-called 'public-private plazas', libraries, roadways, sidewalks, schools, green space, and air rights over public resources.
- ❖ Clarify regulations to oblige the real estate industry to acknowledge that so-called 'privately owned public spaces' (aka, POPs) are in fact publicly owned but privately managed, in perpetuity.



GOAL

10

Better Regional and Transportation Planning

- ❖ We support a regional approach to planning for affordable housing, transportation, green space, parks, increased density, and environmentally sustainable housing.
- ❖ We support a significant financial commitment for public infrastructure and the extension of public transport to car-dependent areas.
- ❖ To lower our city's carbon footprint and to promote democratic sharing of our roadways with the majority of citizens here who do not own cars, we support policies that rewire the city for less traffic, less car commuting, and less physical space devoted to cars.



Where We Are

COMING From



Mayor de Blasio with Real Estate Lobby at REBNY's Annual Gala

- a.** The real estate and construction industries have an outsized influence over city government and its housing, development and planning policies, while residents and small businesses have too little influence or formal say.
- b.** There is a lack of substantive planning or public discussion regarding the range of livable densities in the city.
- c.** There is a lack of substantive planning or public discussion regarding the provision of infrastructure and services in neighborhoods experiencing significant development.

- d.** Residents thrive in a city that is built according to a scale that human, with light, sky, air and nature readily available to all.
- e.** The build out of the city should result in no forced displacement of current residents or businesses and should be planned to avoid the impact of hyper-gentrification.
- f.** The current policy of promoting the development of buildings containing a majority of market rate or near market rate apartments into neighborhoods with mostly below market rate apartments, results in displacement of current residents, regulated as well as non-regulated, and small businesses.
- g.** Light, air, green space, as well as certain iconic city views, libraries and other public institutions and assets belong to the public and cannot be taken without the public's consent freely given in a democratic process.
- h.** Money has corrupted the process of land use in the city.
- i.** Planning for housing and density must also include planning for a great public realm of schools, parks, libraries, hospitals, recreation facilities, access to green space, and essential commerce such as food markets.

The Original Petition for a Human-scale City

We, the undersigned residents of New York City, call for an end to the violence that real estate developers have inflicted on our skyline, parks, public areas, and cityscape with the proliferation of dramatically over-scaled buildings that ignore the historic context of our city.

Whereas:

We are angered when developers seize our commonly shared light, air, gardens, and iconic views for private consumption.

We are aggrieved when we see developers plunder our historic neighborhoods and bury them in a sea of glass, all for luxury housing that destroys more affordable apartments than they create.

We are dismayed that small businesses are being hounded out of their premises by an army of banks and chain stores.

Many parts of our city are already too dense such that the public infrastructure in those places cannot support more people without a decline in the quality of life, destruction of historic fabric, and deterioration of the urban experience that makes New York so great.

Economic growth and affordable housing are indisputably

compatible with both a human-scaled city and the preservation of our historic neighborhoods and architecture.

We conclude that reform must take place or the unique character of New York City will be lost forever.

We call upon the Mayor and the City Council to prioritize and develop zoning changes, height restrictions, demolition moratoria, strengthened environmental review processes, and to implement regulatory reforms and laws to guide future development towards a human-scaled future – one that protects rather than destroys New York’s historic fabric. We ask that appointees to regulatory bodies be free of ties to the real estate industry and that the revolving door between regulatory agencies and the real estate industry be shut. We call for widespread public debate and referenda on these policies and discussion as to what kind of planning is needed to realize a human-scaled city.

We also call on the political clubs to field candidates for all offices who are willing to challenge the power and influence that the real estate lobby has accrued within our government.





Town Hall about the future of Chinatown

MORE ABOUT US

Human-scale NYC is a nonprofit organization that was born out of an alliance of over 100 neighborhood and civic groups across all five boroughs. Our mission is to promote neighborhood livability, democratic control over the built environment, and human-scale urbanism by means of public education, policy debate, and advocacy. We are not funded by real estate or any other lobby. We are an all-volunteer group.



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