

January 27, 2020

New York City Council
Committee on Housing and Buildings
Re: Int 1853-2020

My name is Justin Pascone, Director of Policy for the New York Building Congress. The New York Building Congress is a nearly one-hundred-year-old organization working to encourage the growth and success of the New York City building industry, and the vibrancy of the City at large. We represent more than 500 constituent organizations employing over a quarter million professionals and tradespeople.

Today's building industry has an enormous impact on New York City and our citizens, despite the fact that many of the techniques and practices we employ are stuck in the 20th century. We're encouraged that the Council is considering studying the safe use of drones to perform façade inspections and support their bill to do so. New technologies, like drones, are being used in other cities around the country and the world, and if New York cannot embrace change, we'll be left behind.

Under the City's Façade Inspection Safety Program, more than 10,000 buildings throughout the five boroughs require inspections at least every five years. These inspections involve a team to erect and climb scaffolding, use a construction lift vehicle—or in some cases rappel down the sides of tall buildings—in order to assess a façade's structural integrity.

Drones offer a 21st-century solution to increase public safety, reduce inspection time and cut construction costs. On sites around the country, drones equipped with sophisticated sensors and cameras fly around and above buildings to generate 3-D models and high-quality images. What would take several days to accomplish under current conditions could take only minutes or hours when completed with a drone and a nearby operator, reducing the use of scaffolding in the public realm and saving both time and money for all involved.

Given NYCHA's massive portfolio of buildings, it could be one of the biggest beneficiaries of using drones. With more than 1,500 buildings of 6 stories or more, NYCHA is the city's single largest conductor of façade inspections - conducting roughly 300 inspections per year.

The Building Congress recognizes that the introduction of any new technology in a dense urban setting raises legitimate concerns about potential impacts, but we believe a smart law can address those impacts in a cohesive way.

In addition to the DOB study, we urge the Council also establish a working group of relevant stakeholders, such as engineers, architects, drone manufacturers, NYPD, building owners and qualified inspectors. Together with our partners in government and the industry, it's time we create a safe and sensible system that allows for commercial drone use.

Thank you for the time to be heard on this important matter.