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May 4, 2021

Testimony of the New York Building Congress before the New York City Council's Housing & Buildings Committee on Intro 1635

Chair Cornegy, Jr. and members of the City Council Committee on Housing and Buildings, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony regarding Intro. 1635, which would authorize building owners to install artwork on temporary protective structures at construction sites across the five boroughs.

The New York Building Congress' membership consists of more than 525 constituent organizations and 250,000 skilled tradespeople and professionals, including architects, engineers, contractors and labor, many of whom design and build projects in your neighborhoods. For decades, the building industry has worked in the same manner, erecting temporary protective structures that ensure our workers and the general public are safe, but are also unattractive and rarely provide ancillary benefits to neighbors. That is why we support the spirit of this legislation.

The first City Canvas pilot announced in 2019 in Chelsea was a historic moment, bridging the gap between construction, culture and communities. We commend the efforts of the New York City Council and de Blasio Administration to now make artwork on construction sites a permanent fixture, with the goal of transforming over 300 miles of construction fences and sidewalk sheds that are ubiquitous in every neighborhood across the city. We are also excited for the innovative opportunities this will provide to support local artists and residents and celebrate their talents and culture. Through this legislation, in addition to keeping our neighbors safe, we can also enhance and beautify our urban landscape for New York City residents, visitors and workers for years to come.

While we fully endorse the installation of artwork on construction sites, in an effort to also support our tourism and arts and culture industries, we would support expanding the legislation to expressly include the placement of non-commercial signs in the eligible types of content that may be placed on temporary protective structures. We understand that advertising signs, as defined in the zoning resolution, are prohibited. We believe, however, that by allowing for non-commercial materials to be placed on sites across the city it will be a boon for our identity as the cultural capital of the world.

Our tourism industry supports 400,000 workers and provides billions of dollars to our local economy; as such, creating new and expanded spaces for the display of non-commercial signs will help attract additional visitors to some of our lesser-known attractions. Allowing for these signs would bolster attendance for many cultural organizations and museums that promote free exhibits and outdoor presentations in the outer boroughs that are of interest to the general public and compliment the City's \$30 million "NYC Reawakens" campaign. For instance, this fall, we will launch *What We Build*, our signature Centennial exhibit, free to the public, to celebrate the people, places and structures that have created the New York City we know and love today. It will feature a timeline and displays to document our unique eras, from the skyscraper boom of the 1920s to the development surge saved New York in the 1970s.

As it stands today, the zoning resolution allows for non-commercial copy to be affixed to a zoning lot as long as it does not exceed 12 square feet in size. We ask that the City Council and the Administration further define non-commercial copy materials in the legislation. Such materials should include, but not be limited to, messaging that promotes free events, exhibits and other performances of interest to the public.

Aligned with the goals of supporting artists, beautifying construction sites and better engaging local communities, we proudly support the intent of Intro. 1635. The New York Building Congress and its members are committed to advancing policies that create a more beautiful New York and we look forward to a continued partnership with the City Council to promote the arts and culture. Thank you for your time and consideration.