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March 1, 2021

**Testimony of the New York Building Congress before the New York City Council's
Governmental Operations Committee on the proposed 10-Year Comprehensive Planning
Framework for New York City**

Chair Cabrera and members of the City Council Committee on Governmental Operations, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony regarding *Planning Together: A Comprehensive Planning Framework for New York City* and associated legislation, Intro 2186. The New York Building Congress is here to testify in support of the recommendations focused on proactive planning, the equitable distribution of funding and the furthering of efficiencies.

The Building Congress has, for a hundred years, advocated for investment in infrastructure, pursued job creation and promoted preservation and growth in the New York City area. Our association is made up of over 550 organizations comprised of more than 250,000 professionals such as architects, engineers, contractors, subcontractors and labor representatives. Through our members, events and various committees, we seek to address the critical issues of the building industry and promote the economic and social advancement of our city and its constituents. In furthering that mission, we are proud to see that this report aligns with our *2021 Policy Agenda* recommendations to encourage strategic zoning initiatives, embrace racial equity in planning practices and seek to overhaul interagency coordination.

Over several decades, government officials and elected representatives have made progress in providing long-term guidance, improved coordination between government agencies and greater transparency in decision-making during the planning and budgeting process, all of which have benefited New Yorkers. Through various amendments to the Zoning Resolution and Charter reforms, we have empowered communities, funded critical infrastructure across the city and established processes to drive growth and development. All of these are laudable successes of which we should be proud. Today, our city demands similar, innovative practices to align with our current needs and aspirations.

More recently, we applaud the de Blasio administration and the City Council for investments over the last seven years in the growing needs of New Yorkers. The "Housing New York" plan, published in 2014 and revised in 2017, significantly increased the Capital Budget of previous administrations and aimed to create and preserve 300,000 affordable homes by 2026. In addition, a \$1 billion "Neighborhood Development Fund" was created to support capital projects in rezoned neighborhoods. These commitments translate into billions of dollars invested in housing, libraries, parks, schools, roads and workforce initiatives that tremendously benefit the immediate communities affected, as well as our broader economy several times over.

While these investments may be deemed successes, there remains a severe housing shortage and infrastructure in many neighborhoods across the city, where growth is not induced or projected, remains neglected and in a state of disrepair. Current rezoning efforts are advanced in neighborhoods where there is appetite for such initiatives, leaving untapped potential across the five boroughs. The lack of investment is particularly true for

low-income communities, many of which have felt the effects of exclusionary housing policies, and for our neighbors in New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) properties, where capital needs continue to outpace funding. Despite record-setting progress in housing creation, over 80 percent of New York's low-income households remain rent burdened, and as noted in our *Building the Future of New York City: NYCHA* report, even with novel initiatives such as Rental Assistance Demonstration transfers, unless revenues are drastically increased, the authority risks placing its current residents in unlivable conditions.

In order to better understand the state of infrastructure across New York City, the New York Building Foundation created the *New York City Infrastructure Scorecard* in collaboration with NYU Wagner in June 2020. The scorecard is a comprehensive assessment that examined infrastructure conditions across five core areas: airports, communications, energy, mass transit and roads. The city's overall score in these areas totaled three of five stars, further emphasizing the need for a proactive infrastructure plan.

In the spirit of creating greater efficiency, the Building Congress also renews its call to create the position of Deputy Mayor of Construction within the Office of the Mayor to oversee all public capital construction and serve as a single point of contact for the multiple agencies involved in the development process. Preferably, this position could require certifications in engineering or architecture. More so than the Mayor's Office of Long-term Planning and Sustainability, a new Deputy Mayor of Construction would ensure alignment between agencies that at times operate in silos, have competing interests and place varying demands on the limited resources within the City's budget. Moreover, we urge the Council to streamline the ULURP process and not add additional bureaucratic hurdles that are costly and/or ineffective in achieving the goals of the plan.

Notwithstanding our support, there remain concerns we believe should be addressed and questions requiring answers. If passed as currently written, how will land use applications be treated prior to the adoption of the preferred land use scenarios? Will the Council elect to place a moratorium on applications until such preferred scenarios are adopted? If so, this will have disastrous consequences for our members and the building industry as a whole and abruptly end much of the progress we have achieved in recent years. Real estate and construction remain a vital component to our economy, creating thousands of jobs annually. Additionally, does it remain appropriate to use community districts created in the 1970's as the basis for future planning? Today, our 59 community districts vary greatly in size and density, and our infrastructure and built environment, both in design and function, do not conform to these boundaries. We urge you to explore creating districts specifically designed for this plan or subdistricts within existing community districts to fully address the needs of every community. We are also concerned with the lack of credentials necessary for the position of Director in the Office of Long-Term Planning. Like the specific professional credentials required of appointees to the Landmarks Preservation Commission, we request further clarity on the professional experience and academic preparation necessary for the Director. Lastly, given that power over major transportation infrastructure is vested with the state and federal government, how will this plan ensure coordination with each of those bodies?

In closing, to expedite our economic recovery and advance principles of equity and fairness, we agree that we must continue to innovate the decision-making processes that help our metropolis grow. The current piecemeal approach to planning and capital infrastructure spending exacerbates the frustrations of residents and businesses and will not allow New York City to reach its fullest potential. We must come together to advance recommendations that reduce inequality, support equitable growth and expedite investments in the infrastructure for our 21st century needs. Should the recommendations we highlighted advance, we will begin to lay the groundwork for the type of integrated citywide planning that New York deserves.

We look forward to working with you to advance this effort. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Very truly yours,



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