

THE UNSUSTAINABLE COST *of* SUSTAINABILITY:

PlaNYC 2030 and the Future of New York City

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ABSTRACT: *In this paper I provide a contextual analysis of actually existing politics of sustainability by focusing on Michael Bloomberg’s sustainability plan for New York City, called “PlaNYC 2030.” Based on an expected population growth of one million residents by 2030, the plan outlines a growth-oriented, environmentally friendly agenda for the future development of the city. As the framework within which policies of sustainable development are being advanced in New York City is that of entrepreneurial urban governance, PlaNYC has managed to expand opportunities for growth, while providing the city with a competitive edge in the global struggle for business and capital. However, the social costs and benefits of “green” policies in New York City are unequally shared. The exclusionary nature of the decision-making process that led to the formulation of the plan has produced an agenda that, while striving to find market solutions to balance economic growth and concerns for environmental preservation, lacks any tangible concern for the social implications of the proposed growth.*

In the introduction (section 1), I draw on existing studies on politics of sustainable development to contextualize urban sustainability initiatives against the backdrop of growth- and competition-oriented urban agendas in advanced capitalist cities. In sections 2 and 3, I introduce Bloomberg’s “green” plan for New York City: I briefly chronicle the decision-making process that led to its formulation and clarify its growth-centered approach to sustainability. I discuss

PlaNYC's inadequacy to address the negative social externalities of development in section 4, and I elaborate this further in sections 5 and 6, where I focus in detail on the housing component of the plan to clarify that while PlaNYC focuses mainly on the development of attractive residential opportunities catering to specific groups of affluent city consumers, it does little to alleviate the severe dearth of affordable housing options for low- and middle-income New Yorkers. In the conclusion, I focus on the Mayor's "business as usual" response to the tragic events of Hurricane Sandy in 2012 to discuss whether the City's environmental vision only goes as far as its quest for economic growth allows.

1. THE GREEN CITY as a CATALYST for NEW CITY CONSUMERS

In their account of the relationship between politics of sustainability and global economic competitiveness, Rob Krueger and David Gibbs (2007a, 2007b) have shown that politics of sustainability all too often incorporate environmental concerns into "business as usual" growth- and competition-oriented strategies of governance. Since the structural framework within which policies and practices of sustainable development are pursued in advanced capitalist cities is that of urban entrepreneurialism, "green" policies are expected to expand opportunities for growth while providing cities with a competitive edge in

the global struggle for business and capital. More specifically, sustainable development initiatives can be mobilized as a "quality-of-life" strategy to catalyze and retain specific groups of city consumers (Ibid, 2007). In the last decade, New York City under Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg has not only taken up the environmental challenge, but has also sought to cast itself as a model for "green cities" worldwide. With the launch of "PlaNYC 2030: A Greener, Greater New York" in 2007, the Mayor has put sustainability at the core of a growth-oriented urban agenda aimed at transforming New York into a post-industrial, business- and environmentally friendly city.

Recent studies have stressed the significance of the living preferences of a highly mobile class of affluent professionals as an important determinant of economic development (Lloyd and Clark 2001; Florida 2002, 2005; Glaeser and Saitz 2004). This includes highly educated individuals—flexible workers in the F.I.R.E. industries (finance, insurance, and real estate) and in other sectors of the service economy, and more generally, geographically mobile urban residents with higher-than-average incomes and with a strong discretionary purchasing power. Research involving the preferences and values of this socioeconomic group shows that they tend to base their location patterns on the qualitative assets or "amenities" of a place, rather than on more traditional factors such as the headquarters location of established em-

ploying firms (Florida 2002, 2005). This educated and mobile workforce is attracted to places that host diversified labor markets and allow for qualified employment opportunities, and that offer a range of quality-of-life advantages such as adequate housing, a vibrant cultural life, and a wealth of leisure and entertainment opportunities. They also tend to value the presence of parks and open spaces, and they favor urban density over sprawling suburbs, and public transportation over private automobile use (Florida 2002).

In advanced capitalist cities, the presence of these new urban classes is almost universally encouraged by entrepreneurial policy makers, much of whose agenda revolves around their demands and consumption patterns (Peck 2005). The entrepreneurial “clichéd repertoire of favored policy interventions” (Ibid, 767) aimed at attracting this class of city consumers includes, most notably, the upgrading of inner-city neighborhoods with a particular charm, the provision of attractive housing options, upgrades in public transportation, and “green” developments (strengthening of transit-oriented development; redevelopment along the waterfronts; energy-efficient retrofits; provision of parks, open space, public plazas, bike lanes, and so forth).

Right as he took office, Michael Bloomberg made clear that, in order to maintain a competitive edge in the global marketplace and to keep luring and retaining the new urban

class of well-educated professionals, New York had to be physically transformed into a post-industrial, business- and environmentally friendly city. The production of a brand new urban space would provide the appropriate environment for the favored class of city consumers—the “high-value-added postindustrial sectors that comprised the city’s target market” (Brash 2011, 124): “We’ll continue to transform New York physically—giving it room to grow for the next century—to make it even more attractive to the world’s most talented people.... New York is the city where the world’s best and brightest want to live and work. That gives us an unmatched competitive edge—one we’ll sharpen with investments in neighborhoods, parks and housing” (Bloomberg 2003). To Bloomberg and his advisors, a successful development strategy would be based on providing qualified companies with appropriate space and infrastructure, and their employees with attractive living environments. This would involve comprehensive planning for high-end residential and office space first-class amenities; and improved parks, open spaces, and waterfront areas.

2. THE PROCESS BEHIND PLANYC 2030

PlaNYC 2030 was not the result of a participatory decision-making process, but the product of a vertically integrated management model centered around the leadership

of the Mayor.

During Bloomberg's first term in office, the city embarked on a meticulous process of amendments to the city's obsolete zoning resolution, which dated back to 1961, to make land more responsive to the demands of new markets, industries, and consumers. Each development site was handled as a separate enclave—with little, if any, regard for a comprehensive land-use strategic vision for the city as a whole. However, an overarching, long-term plan to guide development was necessary if the City Planning Commission was to respect its Charter mandate, as New York State's zoning-enabling statute requires that land use changes be undertaken "in accordance with a comprehensive plan" (Nicas 2010, 3). The formulation of a comprehensive plan to articulate and guide a broad range of development efforts was thus seen by city officials as crucial in order to win citizen support for their and the business community's growth agenda.

In 2006, Alex Garvin, former City Planning Commissioner (1995–2004) and Managing Director of Planning for NYC2012 (1996–2005) — New York City's committee for the 2012 Olympic bid (which the city eventually lost to London) — prepared a report for the New York City Economic Development Corporation (EDC), a quasi-governmental organization that operates as the city's economic development vehicle (Garvin 2006). Based on an expected population growth of

one million residents by 2030,¹ the Garvin report used the strict timetable of the Olympic bid as a "forcing mechanism" (Kriegel 2002) to push forward development in blighted areas that had long been targeted by the city as potential locations for growth (Brash 2011, 52). It suggested opportunities for high-density property development in many of the city's underutilized areas (i.e., along the industrial waterfronts, on brownfield sites, and on top of dismissed rail yards) and for improving the public realm by creating new green spaces and plazas, greening boulevards, and extending bike lanes.

The visions of the Garvin Plan became the rationale of Bloomberg's sustainability plan, which was released one year later. The 127-point agenda, called "PlaNYC 2030: A Greener, Greater New York," was crafted by a city department deliberately created by the Mayor, named the Office of Long-Term Planning and Sustainability, and was presented as a comprehensive plan that would make New York "the first environmentally sustainable 21st-century city" (Lueck 2007).

The proposal was applauded by different stakeholders for the broad range of innovative initiatives it outlined to reduce pollution, increase energy efficiency, and improve the quality of streets and parks. Among the supporters were environmentalists, business leaders, and private-sector firms involved in green practices (Finn,

2008). A report by the International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives applauded PlaNYC “as the gold standard for big-city sustainability plans” (ICLEI 2010, 8). According to the ICLEI report, among the factors contributing to PlaNYC’s success were “a strong central management and coordination provided by the Mayor’s Office of Long-Term Planning and Sustainability” and the strong mayoral leadership that allowed a “swift transition from planning to action” (Ibid, 6). The ICLEI report also came to praise the plan for its “methodical, transparent, and inclusive planning process” (Ibid, 6). But the bases for such claims are disputable: although PlaNYC 2030 is in fact a land-use plan, it was crafted with no formal participation by the City Planning Department or the City Planning Commission. Remarkably, it never went through a proper public review process, and it was never presented to the city’s fifty-nine Community Boards, nor to the Borough Presidents and the City Council; there was no formal, legally binding approval (Angotti 2008; Finn 2008; Paul 2011a). Noting that the plan was already being developed when the public outreach process began in the fall of 2006, Paul (2011a) argues that “public participation in PlaNYC 2030 was an afterthought that was initiated only when the Mayor’s office realized it was a necessary component of selling the plan to the public....And the outreach efforts fell well short of best practices in public participation, involving only meetings with hand-picked non-profit organiza-

tions and policy experts and eleven public town hall presentations where the Mayor’s slideshow was presented, followed by limited questions from the audience” (np). The lack of an effective participatory involvement of citizens and local groups in making the plan has also been vocally criticized by the Diversity Committee of the New York Metro Chapter of the APA, which stated that “the forms of participation offered can be categorized as ‘manipulation, therapy, informing, consultation, and placation,’ all of which are at the bottom of Sherry Arnstein’s ‘Ladder of Citizen Participation,’ a classic in the literature of city planning theory” (APA Diversity Committee 2007, 1). Angotti (2008) has quite succinctly summarized the plan’s exclusionary decision-making process as follows: “In scores of public forums and focus groups, people from the mayor’s office offered presentations showcasing the plan and asked people who attended to submit their comments. It was a one-way, top-down process. There was no conversation, and the decisions about what to put in the plan remained in City Hall” (np).

While the preliminary process that led to the formulation of PlaNYC engaged a variety of energy and planning experts, business leaders, and environmentalists, it did not effectively involve the many advocacy groups and community organizations that are active in the city—not only groups advocating for environmental justice, but also tenants’ rights associations, housing advo-

ates, and community-based neighborhood coalitions fighting for a socially sustainable development in their communities.

3. PLANYC 2030: BETWEEN GROWTH *and* SUSTAINABILITY

PlaNYC has been the result of concerns over environmental sustainability as much as a policy response to overcome a recessive economic environment in the aftermath of the global recession, by spurring a new wave of property development and creating new markets and services in a rising local and global green economy. Its growth-centered approach to sustainability has expanded opportunities for economic expansion, while providing the city administration with an alibi for development that is hardly open to contention, as new waves of profit-driven development efforts can be mobilized in the name of a new “green” rationale that is supposedly beneficial to all.

Because of the lack of official approval, PlaNYC 2030 doesn’t have the formal prerequisites to constitute a legally binding plan for the City. This notwithstanding, within one year of its release, over 97% of the Plan’s 127 initiatives were launched, initiating a wealth of legislation in a range of different sectors, from land use to water and energy supply, from transportation to housing, from health to waste management. The smooth implementation of PlaNYC was ensured by the activities of the Office

of Long-Term Planning and Sustainability (OLTPS), the supervisory entity created ad hoc in 2006 as part of the Mayor’s Office. The OLTPS was put in charge of coordinating the operations of all major City agencies and departments, including departments whose focus is on land use, like the Department of Parks & Recreation, the Department of City Planning, the Department of Transportation, the Department of Buildings, and the Department of Housing Preservation and Development.

To improve air quality, the plan promotes hydrogen and hybrid vehicles, supports the introduction of biodiesel into the city’s truck fleet, enforces anti-idling laws, and lowers the maximum sulfur content in heating fuels. The plan also lays out a wide array of strategies for “smart” urban growth—including, among others, the retrofitting of city buildings to improve their energy efficiency; the remediation of brownfield sites; the development of new land by building platforms over transportation infrastructure, such as rail yards, rail lines, and highways; the development of underused or vacant waterfront land; and the conversion of unused schools, hospitals, and other municipal sites for new housing, parks, and public space.

The following paragraphs list some of the most noteworthy strategies outlined in PlaNYC.

As the purpose of this study is to discuss

the social consequences of the growth initiatives outlined in PlaNYC, this list will focus on the land-use components of the plan.

Housing

One of PlaNYC's stated aims is to "create homes for almost a million more New Yorkers, while making housing more affordable and more sustainable" (NYC 2007, 12). Based on the assumption that New York City will become home to over 9 million people by 2030, the plan includes a wealth of provisions to create new residential opportunities across the five Boroughs. Most of the housing initiatives contemplated in PlaNYC are based on the use of contextual zoning changes (rezoning) to loosen the strict segregation of uses across the metropolitan area, to convert manufacturing districts into "mixed-use" communities, to increase residential capacity along transit-oriented corridors, and to reclaim underdeveloped brownfield sites and waterfront land as residential neighborhoods.

Creation of new developable land

In order to open up land for new development, the plan proposes to build over exposed rail yards and highways across the city. Similar initiatives have already been implemented in the past in New York City—most notably along Park Avenue in Midtown Manhattan in the late nineteenth century. The plan foresees the building of

platforms over the Hudson Yards in Manhattan and the Atlantic Yards in Brooklyn. Other areas earmarked for this kind of development are the Sunnyside Yards in Long Island City in Queens, the railroad facilities connected to the Staten Island Ferry, and exposed highways such as the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway (BQE) between Carroll Gardens and Cobble Hill and the Gowanus Expressway, also in Brooklyn.

Strengthening transit-oriented development across the city

The plan aims to accommodate new residential units "within a half-mile of mass transit" (NYC 2007, 19). Most new housing units ought to be located in areas that already have strong transit access, and that can accommodate increased density without straining the existing transportation infrastructure. Plans for transit-oriented developments of this kind are at major transit hubs like Downtown Jamaica in Queens, and at Coney Island, where the Coney Island Strategic Plan envisions growth around the newly rebuilt Stillwell Avenue subway station—the terminal of several train lines in Brooklyn including the D, Q, N, and F trains.

Rezoning of underdeveloped waterfront areas

Another guidepost of PlaNYC 2030 is the development of residential districts along the city's waterfront. In the years before

Bloomberg, large-scale waterfront redevelopments had been undertaken in Battery Park City, on Roosevelt Island, and at the South Street Seaport. During the first Bloomberg term, the City rezoned the Greenpoint-Williamsburg waterfront in Brooklyn and the Long Island City waterfront in Queens. In 2009, the Coney Island waterfront was rezoned to increase residential capacity in the areas where the legendary amusement park once stood.

In 2011, the Department of City Planning released “Vision 2020: New York City Comprehensive Waterfront Plan,” a ten-year blueprint for the future development of the city’s 520 miles of shoreline.

Redevelopment of brownfields

In 2010, the city introduced the city’s first own brownfield Cleanup Program to speed the cleanup and redevelopment of brownfield sites—areas whose soil has been contaminated by industrial discharge—and dedicated a \$15 million fund to facilitate their rehabilitation. The city also established an Office of Environmental Remediation, which is supervising the remediation of 7,600 acres of contaminated land across the metropolitan area. Brownfield Incentive Grants (BIG) have been introduced to incentivize developers to clean up and develop brownfields: by enrolling in the program, landlords can earn grants for cleanup costs and receive government liability protection.

Green buildings

The Green Buildings Act, which became effective in January 2007, requires new municipal buildings, as well as additions and renovations to existing city-owned buildings, to achieve Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) standards of sustainability. The same year, the Mayor signed Executive Order 109, which mandates a goal of 30% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions (through lighting retrofits and heating, ventilation, and air conditioning upgrades) from 4,000 municipal buildings by 2017. Another package of legislation approved in April 2009 (called “the Greener Greater Buildings Plan”) extended mandatory energy-saving improvements to large commercial and residential buildings, and included \$16 million in stimulus funding to help landlords afford the upgrades. In 2011, the City established the New York City Energy Efficiency Corporation (NYCEEC), an independent, non-profit financial corporation with \$37 million in initial capital from federal stimulus funds to provide financing for efficiency retrofit of private buildings throughout the five Boroughs. In April 2012, City Council adopted the “Zone Green” Text Amendment to remove zoning impediments to the retrofitting of existing structures and the construction of new green buildings. This amendment enables private property owners to more easily install renewable energy systems on their buildings, including sun control devices on the facades, solar panels on flat roofs, green roofs, storm water

detention systems and skylights, and even wind turbines on taller buildings near the waterfronts.

Parks and open spaces

One of the goals of PlaNYC 2030 is to “ensure that all New Yorkers live within a 10-minute walk of a park” (NYC 2007, 12). The plan calls for major investments to create open spaces across every Borough, reclaiming underperforming sites for parks and opening underutilized schoolyards as community gardens or playgrounds. In November 2011, the City opened the 200th schoolyard as a local playground in Jackson Heights, Queens. The plan also aims to create a more inviting public realm by opening public plazas in heavily congested areas. Through the launch of the Plaza Program in 2007, dozens of pedestrian plazas have been incorporated in busy crossroads, contributing to transforming overloaded streets and intersections into more welcoming public spaces: plazas have been developed at iconic crossroads like Times Square and Madison Square in Manhattan, Fordham/Kingsbridge Plaza in the Bronx, and Putnam Triangle Plaza and Willoughby Plaza in Brooklyn. In October 2007, the City launched the One Million Trees Initiative with the goal of massively expanding the city’s urban forest. The city Department of Parks and Recreation was granted \$400 million to plant 600,000 new trees along streets, in public parks, and on private properties. Residents, private businesses, and

other organizations are to plant the remaining 400,000 trees. On October 18, 2011 the City marked the planting of 500,000 trees since 2007.

4. THE MISSING PILLAR of SOCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

Concerns for social justice first entered the institutional debate about sustainable development during the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 (also known as the Rio Summit), and became the subject of the 2005 World Summit on Social Development, in which the three components of economic, environmental, and social sustainability were recognized as the interdependent and mutually reinforcing “pillars” of sustainable development (UN 2005). What “social sustainability” may entail, however, has been the subject of various official interpretations, and the ambiguity of the term has allowed it to be easily appropriated into “business as usual” political practices. A convincing definition has been proposed by Campbell (1996), who argues that initiatives aimed at balancing growth and environmental preservation are not sustainable unless they address the “third pillar” of social justice, which he defines as “the striving towards a more equal distribution of resources among social groups across the space of cities and of nations” (302), and which has been elsewhere defined as “an equitable distribution

of the costs and benefits (material and non-material) of any development ” (Scottish National Heritage Society, quoted in Hoff 1998). Campbell (1996) thus argues that sustainable planning efforts must strive to reconcile the three conflicting and mutually interlinked priorities of protecting the environment, promoting growth, and advocating social justice. Certainly, this is not an easy task to achieve in concrete terms. While sustainable planning policies in the advanced capitalist world typically advocate for economic development or environmental awareness, evidence suggests that propositions to advance social equity are often much leaner in vigor (Agyeman, Bullard, and Evans 2003). This points to another dilemma, one that Krueger and Gibbs (2007a) have summarized quite appropriately with the slogan “the sustainable development paradox,” contending that “the fluid meanings of sustainability have enabled different groups of actors to redefine and manipulate the term in ways that suit their own political ends” (Krueger and Gibbs, 8). While narratives of sustainable development are often uncritically incorporated into neoliberal, pro-growth-oriented governmental agendas, “actually existing sustainabilities”² (Krueger and Agyeman 2005) show how difficult it is to integrate the social, economic, and political dimensions of sustainable development on the ground when notions of sustainability are imbued with market-centered notions of competitiveness, uneven development, and perpetual growth: environmental sustain-

ability and social justice are not always compatible objectives (Dobson 2003), and neo-liberal, free market solutions to environmental challenges run the risk of exacerbating, rather than resolving, social inequalities (Tokar 1996).

PlaNYC is no exception: unsurprisingly, left out from Bloomberg’s sustainability agenda is a tangible concern for the social impacts of growth. Critics of PlaNYC 2030 have repeatedly pointed out the problems with PlaNYC’s narrow focus on land use and economic growth (APA NY Chapter 2007; Marcuse 2007; Cowett 2008; Angotti 2008; Finn 2008). The APA’s New York Metro Chapter (2007) has criticized the plan for being based on a single assumption about the city’s future population growth and energy needs, without presenting any alternative scenarios. According to Marcuse (2007) and Angotti (2008), PlaNYC lacks any assessment of the costs and benefits of the proposed initiatives for different social groups. Finn (2008) points to the “disconnect between Bloomberg’s PlaNYC and the many pressing equity issues that face New Yorkers, from gentrification and affordable housing to environmental injustice” (13). Finally, Cowett (2008) claims that “there is no discussion of race and economic disadvantage in a city that is one of the most segregated in the U.S., has over a million people requiring some form of food assistance, and is losing affordable housing at an unprecedented rate” (2). This is a serious omission in an agenda developed for

a city that suffers from one of the highest levels of social inequality on the planet.

It is not an accidental omission, however. The exclusionary, technocratic nature of the decision-making process behind PlaNYC 2030 has led to the formulation of policies whose social costs and benefits are unequally shared. One of the explicit goals of PlaNYC 2030 is to make New York City competitive in the global market on the basis of “livability” (NYC 2007, 10), a concept that the plan measures mostly in terms of “quality-of-life” assets. PlaNYC’s vision of the city is a consumer-oriented one, in which urban planning, technology, and design can be mobilized to enhance “quality of life” for a favored class of city consumers. It is a vision guided by a faith that a well-designed urban landscape of amenable public spaces, waterfront promenades, and green streetscapes can attract affluent city consumers and become a catalyst of economic growth. Unsurprisingly, Finn (2008) notes that one of the common lines of critique of the plan is that “even the most environmentally sensitive aspects of the plan, from park rehabilitation to bike lanes to tree planting, are in fact merely de facto pro-gentrification tactics that are increasingly remaking the city as a more active site of increasingly affluent consumption” (15).

PlaNYC’s underlying assumption that green is good, as long as it doesn’t prevent growth, brings about lots of contradictions, so that discussions of the negative exter-

nalities of the growth policies embedded in Bloomberg’s sustainability agenda (uneven spatial development, overdevelopment, housing price inflation, gentrification) are missing in the official debate around sustainability: the words “inequality,” “gentrification,” and “displacement” are notably nowhere to be found in PlaNYC 2030.

The lack of adequate commitment to these matters also explains why the plan is not only proving unable to properly address the dramatic issue of affordable housing shortage in America’s least affordable city (CUF, 2009), but may actually be contributing to its exacerbation, as will be clarified in the following two sections.

5. PLANYC 2030 and the AFFORDABLE HOUSING CRISIS

The severe dearth of affordable housing is one of the most dramatic issues impacting the lives of middle- and low-income New Yorkers, one that deserves particular attention in an analysis that focuses on the “third pillar” of sustainability politics. In this section, I discuss PlaNYC’s housing initiatives and their impact on housing affordability in New York City.

In 2003, before embarking upon his aggressive development agenda, Mayor Bloomberg launched a five-year plan to develop and preserve apartments for low- to middle-

income residents, called the “New Housing Marketplace plan” (NHMP). Initially, the plan forecasted the building or preservation of 65,000 units affordable to low- and medium-income families by 2008. In 2006, at the peak of the national housing bubble, the plan’s goal grew to create or preserve 165,000 affordable homes by 2013, with the city aiming to build 92,000 units and preserve another 73,000. With the city’s slide into a recession and the weakening of the local housing market in 2008, however, the plan was again modified: the deadline was extended to 2014, and a greater emphasis was put on preserving the affordability of 105,600 existing subsidized units, while the plan’s building program was reduced to 54,500 units. The NHMP, the city’s largest investment in housing production since the Koch Administration in the mid-1980s, has been a powerful internal marketing tool to energize low-income New Yorkers and to persuade them that their Mayor cared about their daily struggles. As for providing affordable housing for middle- and low-income households, however, many analysts agree that the plan hasn’t even come close to solving the issue (Angotti 2009; NYC IBO 2012; New York City Comptroller 2012).

Between 2000 and 2007, New York City lost 569,700 units of affordable housing due to rent destabilization and rent increases (Arden, 2011). A 2009 study by the Center for an Urban Future showed that in the third quarter of 2008 only 10.6 per-

cent of housing in the metropolitan region had remained affordable to people earning the median area income—the lowest share of any US city. According to the report, the lack of affordable housing had forced thousands of New Yorkers to flee the city in search of less expensive areas during the booming years from 2002 to 2006 (CUF, 2009).

The release of PlaNYC in 2007 gave housing advocates some ground for hope, as the plan promised to give a decisive boost to Bloomberg’s NHMP by “making housing more affordable and more sustainable” (NYC 2007, 12) and by massively expanding opportunities for residential construction across the five Boroughs. This would be achieved mostly by rezoning underperforming urban land to increase its profitability and residential capacity. Rezoning plans have been adopted to create additional housing along transit-oriented corridors, to convert manufacturing waterfronts into residential communities, and to reclaim underdeveloped brownfield land and unused rail yards and highways as mixed-use neighborhoods. The backbone of PlaNYC’s efforts to create additional affordable housing lies in the application of two key devices: rezoning (to allow for taller and denser buildings along transit corridors and new housing opportunities in areas once reserved for commercial or industrial uses), and inclusionary zoning (subsidies to incentivize private development of affordable units in new market-rate residential

developments in exchange for floor area bonuses).

In the following paragraphs, I list some of the major rezoning plans for housing development that have been adopted since the launch of PlaNYC.

- Starting in July 2007, the City adopted the largest rezoning project of the Bloomberg Administration. The Jamaica Plan in Queens is expected to host 5,200 housing units, including 700 affordable units, along with 3 million square feet of commercial space.
- In 2008, the City approved transit-oriented rezonings for the Upper West Side in Manhattan, Bedford-Stuyvesant South, and Fort Greene/Clinton Hill in Brooklyn. All of the plans incorporated inclusionary zoning bonuses to foster the private production of affordable housing.
- In November 2008, the city adopted an ambitious waterfront rezoning plan for Hunter's Point South in Queens: the 30-acre site, sitting on one-half mile of East River shoreline directly connected to Manhattan, was rezoned to become a dense mixed-use community with 5,000 new residential units, ten acres of waterfront parkland, new commercial developments, community facilities, and the potential for affordable units on adjacent sites.
- In 2009, transit-oriented rezonings were approved for the 125th Street corridor in Harlem, the East Village/Lower East Side in Manhattan, Dutch Kills in Queens, St. George in Staten Island, Hunts Point and the Lower Concourse in the Bronx, and Coney Island in Brooklyn. All of these rezonings contained inclusionary zoning provisions. In 2009, development was also approved for the western half of the Hudson Yards, where eight towers are expected to house hotels, office buildings and approximately 5,000 apartments, 431 of which should rent at below-market rates.
- In 2010, the City moved forward on the West Side Yard, a project that will transform a 26-acre MTA/Long Island Rail Road train storage yard on the far west side of Manhattan into a high-density residential and commercial neighborhood, which is expected to transform the Hudson Yards into a proper extension of the Midtown business district with over 13,000 units of housing and 24 million square feet of commercial use. In 2011, the City Planning Commission approved rezonings for West Clinton in Manhattan, Boerum Hill in Brooklyn, Sunnyside-Woodside in Queens, and Williamsbridge/Baychester in the Bronx. In West Clinton and Sunnyside-Woodside, inclusionary zoning provisions were included to produce affordable housing. In the same year, the City also broke ground on Studio City, a mixed-use develop-

ment within the Hudson Yards rezoning area that should include 1,200 residential units, 600 of which are affordable.

- In 2011, the Via Verde project in the South Bronx, a green mixed-use complex with 202 residential units, as well as retail and community spaces, was completed. In 2011 alone, 4,055 new housing units were produced across the metropolitan area.
- In 2012, the West Harlem and the Bedford Stuyvesant North rezonings were adopted. Both plans incorporate inclusionary zoning bonuses.
- In March 2013, construction began on two residential towers and on the waterfront park at Hunter's Point South, which is expected to become the largest housing complex to be built in New York City since the 1970s. The 925 apartments in the two buildings should permanently house low-, moderate- and middle-income families.

Looking back at five years since the launch of PlaNYC, even critical voices can't deny the monumental proportions of the efforts made by the Bloomberg administration in terms of land-use changes to maximize residential development. Since 2007, the City has created over 92,000

housing units and adopted 55 neighborhood rezonings. Overall, since Bloomberg's first

term in office (2002), the City has completed 119 rezonings, covering over 11,000 blocks and 36 percent of the city's total built area (NYC 2013).

However, these endeavors haven't even come close to alleviating the dramatic shortage of affordable housing in New York City (Furman Center 2009; NYC IBO 2012). According to some commentators, these policies may have instead exacerbated the dearth of housing options for low- and middle-income New Yorkers, contributing to reinforcing segregation along racial and social lines (Paul, 2011b).

From Bedford Stuyvesant to Coney Island, from 125th Street in Harlem to the Lower East Side, the city's rezoning plans have increased residential density, fostered mixed-use and transit-oriented developments, created new parks and open spaces, and led to an overall upgrading of the city's physical environment. But the reengineering of the city as a post-industrial "green" destination, and the resultant influx of a new population of affluent consumers, elite businesses, and spending visitors has triggered a process of generalized increase in land values and rental prices, sparking a speculative market that has resulted in a net loss of affordable housing options for the city's middle- and low-income households. Yet City officials never showed concerns that their very housing agenda may have been contributing to exacerbating an already prohibitive housing market, making the shortage of

affordable housing more severe, and intensifying, rather than alleviating, patterns of gentrification and displacement in the city (Angotti 2011; Paul 2011b).

In fact, the Bloomberg administration has shown a rather cynical and politically savvy (in terms of electoral politics) approach to the question of affordable housing: while the rezoning agenda incorporated in PlaNYC 2030 mobilized waves of luxury construction across the metropolitan area for a new urban class of affluent city consumers, the NHMP was the administration's half-hearted attempt to alleviate the plight of middle-class New Yorkers struggling with the consequences of the city's very growth policies.

6. UNSUSTAINABLE HOUSING

Unaffordable housing means unsustainable housing, as there are far-reaching human and social costs associated with housing insecurity or poor housing conditions (Hartman 1984, 1998; Fullilove 2004; Newman and Wyly 2006; Turffrey 2010). The lack of affordable, decent housing options and the resulting instability of tenure can affect family relationships, personal safety, access to employment and economic opportunities, and mental and physical health (Hartman 1984, 1998; Turffrey 2010; Fullilove 2004). The hardships associated with housing insecurity also translate into tangible costs that are born by society as a whole

(Hartman 1984, 1998).

Even though PlaNYC includes specific provisions to increase targeted affordability programs for middle- and low-income residents, the plan's solution to the city's housing crisis was mostly based on the doctrine that increasing the numerical supply of residential units would automatically drive down housing prices (Cowett 2008, Angotti 2011). The plan states: "Without action our city's housing stock won't be as affordable or sustainable as it should be. That's why we will expand our supply potential by 300,000 to 500,000 units to drive down the price of land, while directing growth toward areas served by public transportation" (NYC 2007, 12).

However, simply increasing the numerical supply of housing does not make a difference when the majority of the new housing produced remains unaffordable to local residents. In 2010, in the midst of a recessive economy, the PlaNYC 2010 Progress Report acknowledged the "mismatch between the housing that many New Yorkers, particularly low, moderate, and middle-income New Yorkers, need and can afford and the housing being constructed by the private market" (NYC 2010, 11). One year later, the PlaNYC 2011 Progress Report candidly admitted: "Making housing more accessible and affordable to New Yorkers requires more than increasing the overall housing supply. New market-rate housing generally serves higher income levels.

While new inventory generally relieves pressures on costs in the long run, housing currently is too expensive for many New Yorkers” (NYC 2011, 21). Although thousands of housing units have been built, just a small portion of them has resulted to be really affordable to low- and middle-class New Yorkers.

As opposed to cities like Boston or San Francisco, New York’s inclusionary zoning legislation, which was supposed to stimulate the production of housing units affordable to low- and middle-income New Yorkers, is not mandatory. Hence, in a booming luxury market in the years before 2008 and right after 2009, very few developers profited from this and other public subsidies, while most focused on the development of market-rate housing. As a result, by the end of 2011, only about 3,100 units of inclusionary housing units were started as part of the NHMP (New York City IBO 2012, 11). Furthermore, the prices of income-targeted housing in new developments are measured from the average median income (AMI) of New York City as a whole. In many working-class neighborhoods where rezoning plans were implemented, however, the AMI was significantly lower, so that a large portion of the newly produced “affordable” units remained far out of the financial reach of local residents.

In addition, in many instances the rezoning plans spearheaded by PlaNYC are acting as a displacement tool in low-income

neighborhoods where residential rehabilitations, conversions, and new constructions are threatening the livelihood of longtime residents, businesses, and industries (Paul 2011b). In many cases, the adoption of rezoning plans has brought about overnight surges in property values, pushing landlords to increase rents, evict their tenants, or demolish buildings to make room for more profitable development (see Busà 2012). Substantial changes in housing values are harmful particularly to renters, as soaring rents push housing in the neighborhood out of their reach (Newman and Wyly 2006). In many rezoned areas, phenomena of “predatory equity” are occurring in which building owners and investors illegally evict tenants in order to extract higher profits (Pratt Center 2008).

The New York City Comptroller report (2012) showed that that the percentage of New York City households that pay more than 30 percent of their income on rent has increased significantly in the last three decades: from 39 percent in 1980 to 41 percent in 2000, with the steepest increase occurring during the ten years of the Bloomberg administration (2002-2012), when the number of households living in nonaffordable housing reached 49% of the population in 2010. According to the New York State Comptroller report (2011), in 2010 almost 30 percent of all New York City households spent over 50 percent of their income on rent, a level that is considered by HUD to reflect a severe housing burden.³ In ad-

dition, nearly 20 percent of all households in the City spent more than 75 percent—almost all of their income—on rent (New York City Comptroller 2012). This decrease in affordability reflects a steady increase in rental prices during the Bloomberg years (CUF, 2009). From 1980 to 2000, the percentage of apartments that were unaffordable to households earning the median income was at around 20 percent. But by 2010, almost 40 percent of all rental units had become unaffordable to households earning the median income (New York City Comptroller 2012).

Bloomberg’s “luxury city”⁴ has been expanding unrelentingly out of Manhattan into the outer Boroughs, despite the financial crisis of 2007/08 and the following recession. (After a brief halt in 2008, high-end real estate development was back on its feet in 2009-2010, and focused mostly in the outer Boroughs, especially Long Island City in Queens, and Brooklyn.) The boom in the luxury housing market has been paralleled by the loss of thousands of units of housing affordable to middle- and lower-income New Yorkers due to conversion of low-income housing units into priced condos, expiring rent stabilization programs, and inadequate tenant protection laws. Since Bloomberg took office in 2002, any effort at bringing new affordable units has been far outweighed by the loss of 200,000 affordable apartments due to gentrification and rent deregulation. The largest portion (137,000) of affordable units was

lost due to the deregulation of apartments that were part of the rent regulation system. Thousands of other units that received some form of federal assistance were taken out of subsidy programs and converted into market-rate apartments in expectation of higher returns (Fernandez 2009). Between 2002 and 2008, the number of units affordable to low-income households — those earning less than 80 percent of the city’s AMI, or less than \$37,000 — fell by almost 17 percent, while the share of rental units affordable to this group dropped by 11 percent (Furman Center 2009).

Low-income residents who are unable to afford escalating housing costs are left with no other choice than ending up in the city’s homeless shelter system. Under Bloomberg, homelessness in New York City has constantly risen, reaching the highest levels ever registered since the Great Depression of the 1930s, with an all-time record of over 50,000 homeless people sleeping each night in the New York City municipal shelter system by March 2013 (Coalition for the Homeless 2013); between 2002 and 2013, under the mayoralty of Bloomberg, the number of homeless New Yorkers in the municipal shelter system has increased by 61 percent and the number of homeless families has increased 73 percent.

The continuing upward trend in rents (in a city where 68 percent of the population rents homes, compared to 33 percent nationwide), and the difficulty of finding

available housing options is a dilemma that the Mayor's plan seems structurally unable to solve. Instead, during the Bloomberg years, the city has been steadily losing more affordable units than it gained under the NHMP and PlaNYC combined: as of 2012, the Mayor's plans haven't even come near to closing the gap between demand and supply for affordable housing in the city (NYC IBO, 2012).

7. "GOLD STANDARD of SUSTAINABILITY" or "BUSINESS as USUAL" in GREEN CLOTHING?

On October 29, 2012, hurricane Sandy wreaked havoc across the East Coast, devastating homes and infrastructures along the New York and New Jersey shores, and flooding large sections of Lower Manhattan, including Battery Park and the Ground Zero construction site; Queens and Brooklyn; and with particularly severe disruption at Coney Island and the Rockaways. The East River overflowed its banks, flooding seven subway tunnels and causing the worst damage in the history of the New York City subway system (Flegenheimer 2012). On November 26, Governor Cuomo estimated costs to New York State at \$42 billion, claiming that Sandy had an even greater economic impact than Hurricane Katrina because of the denser population in the New York City area (Kaplan 2012). Many of the areas devastated by the hur-

ricane (such as Staten Island's North Shore, Hunter's Point South, and the Rockaways in Queens), were flood-prone areas (Turetsky 2012) that had been earmarked for development through PlaNYC's "Vision 2020: New York City Comprehensive Waterfront Plan" in 2011. Despite repeated warning reports of rising sea levels and potential storm surges on the city's coastline dating back at least a decade,⁵ the City had never questioned the validity of further development along the waterfronts, one of the main cornerstones of PlaNYC.

In the aftermath of these tragic events, criticism was voiced as Mayor Bloomberg promptly announced that the disaster would not deter the City from pushing for further development along the city's shoreline: "People like to live in low-lying areas on the beach, it's attractive. People pay more, generally, to be closer to the water even though you could argue they should pay less because it's more dangerous. But people are willing to run the risk" (Bloomberg, quoted in Chaban 2012).

Although he acknowledged the necessity to limit future damage by strengthening building-code standards for flood protection in these areas,⁶ the Mayor played down the necessity of undertaking major infrastructural investments to mitigate storm surges, in order not to inhibit future investments in the city's exclusive waterfront properties: "Let me be clear: we are not going to abandon the waterfront. We are not going

to leave the Rockaways or Coney Island or Staten Island's South Shore. But we cannot just rebuild what was there and hope for the best. We have to build smarter and stronger and more sustainable....No matter what we do, the tides will continue to come in. And so we have to make our city more resilient in other ways, especially when it comes to infrastructure" (Bloomberg, quoted in Pinto 2012).

In the aftermath of Sandy, critics questioned once more whether further development along the city's waterfront was still a desirable choice for the city (Angotti 2012; Rayman 2012). But the Mayor's "business as usual" response to the tragic events raised the issue of whether the City's sustainability vision only goes as far as its quest for growth allows. The Mayor's sustainability plan is, after all, an agenda for growth (Cowett 2008). Sustainability, according to Bloomberg's agenda, can thrive in a competitive, growth-oriented framework of governance where design, technological innovation, and "smart" planning, coupled with incentives to "green" businesses, will do the job of preserving the environment, under the assumption that "the basic instruments for responding to ecological crisis are technology and the market" (Wallis 2010).

New York City's "green" agenda has been a response to the demands of new markets and consumers, as much as it has been an active producer of such consumer demands.

By physically transforming the city, it has acknowledged as much as it has facilitated the decline of the local manufacturing industry and the rise of a post-industrial, F.I.R.E.-dependent, consumer-oriented, and environmentally friendly city. Because of its very unthreatening stance towards growth, PlaNYC has been well received among the business community, and has proven able to be bolted quite easily onto entrepreneurial, market-centered strategies of urban governance. Unsurprisingly, the Mayor's sustainability approach has been criticized for being "merely another wolf in green clothing, or what Owens (1994) calls 'rhetoric plus business as usual'" (Finn 2008, 2).

Although its many environmental efforts are commendable, PlaNYC does not explicitly address the goals of social and economic equity, and it does not ensure that new growth will generate equal opportunities for all New Yorkers. The exclusionary nature of the decision-making process that led to the formulation of the plan has produced an agenda that, while striving to find market solutions to balance economic growth and concerns for environmental preservation, fails to address issues that are of major concern among the city's most vulnerable residents, like the need for decent and affordable housing. The costly upzonings on flood-prone land, and the rise of luxury residential projects in once thriving manufacturing and working-class districts raise the issue of whether a "green" New

York can be at all sustainable and affordable to most New Yorkers.

¹ These calculations were announced in a report released by the Department of City Planning in December 2006, “New York City Population Projections by Age/Sex & Borough.”

² Krueger and Agyeman (2005) call for a greater focus sustainability as it is actually practiced in local contexts. With “actually existing sustainabilities” they refer to “actual practices rather than broad initiatives or agendas, or even guiding principles” about sustainability (411).

³ According to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), a generally accepted definition of “affordability” is for a household to pay no more than 30 percent of its annual income on housing; households that are forced to pay more than 30 percent of their income for housing are considered cost burdened and may have difficulty affording necessities such as food, clothing, transportation, and medical care.

⁴ In January 2003, at an economic development summit cosponsored by the Partnership for New York City and NYCEDC, Michael Bloomberg claimed, “If New York City is a business, it isn’t Wal-Mart. It isn’t trying to be the lowest-priced product in the market....It’s a high-end product, maybe even a luxury product. New York offers tremendous value, but only for those companies able to capitalize on it.”

⁵ Rayman (2012) cites a 2000 Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) forecast that predicted that a quarter of the structures 500 feet from the coast will be eventually destroyed by the rising sea level. He adds that “in January 2011, a report from the state’s Sea Level Rise Task Force project-

ed that the water level in New York Harbor will rise two to five inches by 2025. The group proposed additional rules limiting building in flood zones, protecting wetlands and other natural storm barriers, and moving infrastructure to safer areas. But Bloomberg’s deputy mayor for long-term planning at the time, Adam Freed, objected to the proposal because it would stifle development and add another layer of state regulation.”

⁶ In May 2013, the Department of City Planning started a public review process for a zoning text amendment that should enable new and existing buildings in designated flood zones to meet the latest federal flood-protection standards.

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