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Editorial: The city has a chance to correct a mindset from the 1960s to create more housing

The Editors

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Buck Ennis

Single-story commercial strips, like this one on Church Avenue in Brooklyn, could see more mixed-use development under Mayor Eric Adams' proposed pro-housing zoning changes.

In the world of urban planning, it's not every day that an opportunity comes along to correct an historic mistake.

New York can never bring back the original and grand Penn Station, which was allowed to languish before its 1963 demolition—an infamously short-sighted move that played a role in galvanizing a preservation movement that later saved Grand Central.

Nor can the city fully reverse the poverty, pollution and property-value destruction unleashed by the 1955 construction of the Cross Bronx Expressway, the first interstate highway in the U.S. that carved up an urban neighborhood.

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But the city does have an opportunity—and an urgent need—to significantly boost housing production by reversing another relic of an era marked by urban decay and car-centric planning. The administration of Mayor Eric Adams wants to [update several restraints on development](#) that date back to the city's 1961 zoning code, including size limits, height caps and parking mandates that have blocked mixed-use projects across large swaths of the city.

The move, part of a plan known as [City of Yes for Housing Opportunity](#), would allow developers to construct more housing in neighborhoods such as Astoria, Riverdale and Bay Ridge, particularly along low-rise commercial corridors that are now surrounded by taller residential-only buildings, as reporters Eddie Small and Nick Garber [reported recently](#). The commercial strip proposal should allow for additional 2- to 4-story apartment buildings along outer-borough thoroughfares, while a provision focused on adding housing near transit would allow 3- to 5-story apartment buildings in neighborhoods like Bensonhurst, Kew Gardens and parts of the eastern Bronx.

Although such neighborhoods cover 44.7% of land across the five boroughs, they are home to just 28.4% of the population, and their rate of permitting new housing from 2010 to 2020 was much lower than the rate for the city overall, according to a 2022 Furman Center report.

Similar attempts to enact citywide zoning changes have often faltered, in part due to opposition from low-rise and low-income communities afraid of major development, so the Adams administration is emphasizing a shared responsibility to build "a little more housing in every neighborhood." The planned changes are spread across almost every area and zoning designation: In high-density neighborhoods, for instance, developers could build 20% more, so long as they include some affordable housing.

The plan is thoughtful and comprehensive, and it would help make the city more livable and accessible for everyone. The City Council should guard against its tendency to greet with skepticism proposals that would add more housing to the city's suburban-oriented neighborhoods, or an inclination to deny the mayor a win. All of New York's neighborhoods must play a role for the city to truly confront its housing shortage and correct a 1960s mindset on urban planning that set up this mess in the first place.

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