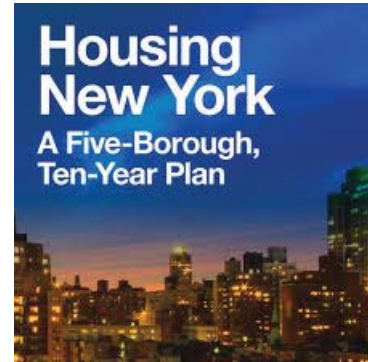


### Case Study: New York City

The mayor of New York City saw such a clear connection between an efficient land development review and approval process and affordable housing development that he made it one of the key strategies for increasing production of affordable housing in the city's housing plan created in 2014, *Housing New York: A Five Borough, 10-Year Plan*. The plan sets a goal of creating and preserving 200,000 units of affordable housing over the next 10 years and fostering strong, economically diverse neighborhoods across the five boroughs.



#### New York City 10-Year Housing Plan

Among other strategies to encourage affordable housing production and preservation, the housing plan includes both streamlining and zoning reform to speed the process and reduce costs for developers.

Specifically, the plan calls for the city to:

- Reform zoning, building and housing codes, and other regulations to lower costs and open development opportunities;
- Streamline interagency coordination, including upgrading technology, to simplify and expedite development approvals and permits;
- Implement new rules to provide greater predictability and transparency to the pre-certification review of land use and environmental review applications; and
- Speed up the City Environmental Quality Review process and improve coordination among agencies.<sup>x</sup>

Other key strategies for producing and preserving the 200,000 affordable housing units include implementing a mandatory inclusionary housing program; protecting tenants and stemming the tide of rent deregulation; adopting a more strategic approach to preservation; piloting a program to incentivize energy efficiency retrofits for affordable housing in need of preservation, creating energy savings and long-term affordability; developing affordable housing on underused public and private sites; creating new programs to develop small, vacant sites; and introducing new mixed-income programs.

"This new system was very much designed to ... speed up the process and to really harness technology."

- Libby Rohlfing, HPD Director of Communications

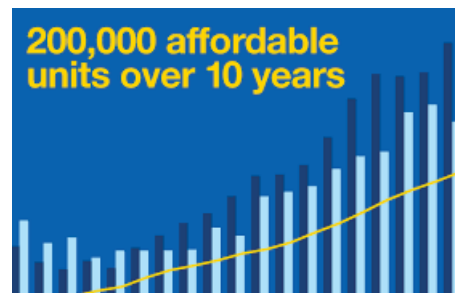
In order to implement the *Housing New York* plan, the Mayor's 2015 budget provided for increased staffing at the Department of City Planning and the Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD).

The effort to implement the streamlining and zoning reform strategies included in the plan were led by a task force. The task force's first steps were to solicit input from industry stakeholders about how to consolidate and streamline the permitting and review processes across agencies in order to reduce costs and avoid delays for developers.<sup>xi</sup>

Based on this input, the task force created a series of initiatives. Two examples of these initiatives that demonstrate how the city is operationalizing the ten-year housing plan are the efforts made to date in streamlining inclusionary housing projects, and in a new e-permitting system called eSubmit.

### **Streamlining inclusionary housing projects**

Some of the city's streamlining efforts were focused on inclusionary housing projects. The city replaced a lengthy, often iterative design and architectural review process with a system that uses an architect's certification, combined with random audits, to ensure compliance with a reduced set of design requirements.



HPD Commissioner Vicki Been reported on results to stakeholders: "As a result, in the first nine months of FY15, we closed on 1,663 affordable units, more than the Program produced in any fiscal year since 1988, the start of the Program."<sup>xii</sup>

### **BLDS eSubmit for affordable housing projects**

Perhaps the most significant change to the process is the adoption of an electronic submission and review system called Building and Land Development Services (BLDS) eSubmit. HPD and the NYC Department of Buildings (DOB) collaborated to adopt the technology, which allows both agencies and the developer to review the architectural drawings.

Referring to the old process, Libby Rohlfing, director of communications at HPD, said, "...These things aren't always transparent. It takes a long time, there are so many different city agencies you need approval from, and it's hard for architects and developers to even know which department has their plan and where they are in the process. This new system was very much designed to be responsive to those concerns and to speed up the process and to really harness technology."

In addition to eliminating the need to print large sets of drawings or plans because of electronic submissions, applicants can also see where they are in the process. Email messages will be sent to project stakeholders during each project milestone.

BLDS eSubmit also makes comments more clear and concise because they can be added directly on the plans/drawings instead of in a BLDS memo.

“As opposed to a long memo, it’s more visual,” said Rohlfing. “They can actually see what comments are being made by the agencies on their drawings.”

The system also increases coordination with the DOB, which will reduce plan processing times, eliminate duplication of efforts, and ensure greater consistency within BLDS and between the agencies.

As of August 15, 2015, all projects requesting a design review of the initial submission of new construction projects must be submitted through BLDS eSubmit. This includes projects participating in any of the New Construction Finance loan programs, Supportive Housing Loan Program, Senior Affordable Rental Apartments Program, and Inclusionary Housing Program. BLDS eSubmit will eventually be used for preservation projects as well.

This document is a portion of NAHB's report  
*Development Process Efficiency: Cutting Through the Red Tape.*

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National Association of Home Builders



## Development Process Efficiency: Cutting Through the Red Tape

