

Testimony of Walter Mugdan on behalf of Westmoreland Association For New York City Council Hearing on the “City of Yes” Housing Proposals

October 22, 2024 <http://www.westmoreland.org>

I am the president of the Westmoreland Association, a civic association representing the Westmoreland area in Little Neck, in northeastern Queens. We are strongly opposed to the *City of Yes* Housing Opportunity package.

We agree there is a housing affordability crisis in NYC. But the *City of Yes* does not significantly or sufficiently incentivize affordable housing. Rather, many of the proposals enable market-rate housing.

We strongly disagree with the stated *City of Yes* goal of eliminating single-family zoned areas. NYC has one of the lowest percentages of single-family dwellings of any major city in the nation – just 15%, a fraction of the percentage in places like Los Angeles, Minneapolis, or Atlanta. It is appropriate and desirable for a large city to have mixed zoning, ranging from one-family homes to large apartment houses. Having one’s own home remains an important part of the American dream for many, particularly those aspiring to become part of the middle class. Eliminating that opportunity will drive these productive citizens out of our City.

We strongly oppose allowing Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs) to be created in single-family properties. This proposal effectively ends single-family zoning, and approximately doubles the allowable density in those zones; occupants will be at risk from substandard construction and inadequate means of egress. Our community would be a prime target for a considerable amount of ADU development.

We oppose elimination of the requirement for parking spaces with new development. In places like eastern Queens, where mass transit access is limited, it is a virtual necessity to use a car to do most kinds of shopping. On-street parking is already severely limited. The elimination of parking requirements is particularly troublesome in our area.

We oppose the significant increase in the Floor-Area Ratio for one-family zones. The increased bulk does not significantly help address the affordable housing shortage, while substantially damaging the character of neighborhoods and increasing impermeable surface area, thereby increasing stormwater runoff and further straining sewer infrastructure.

Our community of some 250 single-family homes is entirely within what *City of Yes* designates as a transit-oriented development (TOD) zone, because of our proximity to the Little Neck Long Island Railroad station. We are opposed to allowing 3-4 story apartments on most corner properties throughout our community. Here in Little Neck, there are appropriate places for high density development just a few blocks away along Northern Boulevard -- with good bus service -- and also along Little Neck and Marathon Parkways, all within a short walk from the railroad station. Indeed, Little Neck Parkway immediately south of the station already has extensive three- and four-story multi-family housing, and there are larger apartment houses within a block of Northern Boulevard. The *City of Yes* ignores such important local realities, instead using an inappropriate “one size fits all” approach.

The problem is affordability, NOT insufficient housing. There are many tens of thousands of vacant apartments throughout the City. Moreover, existing zoning throughout New York City is currently more than sufficient to provide the number of additional units that the Mayor and the Planning Commission are seeking. 150,000 new units were approved in the first half of 2024; these will be ready in the next several years. It is not necessary to eliminate the relatively small amount of single-family zoned areas in the City to accommodate the legitimate need for additional affordable housing.

We ask the Council to vote NO, and we encourage the Planning Commission to work with local Community Boards to identify locally suitable approaches to increasing affordable housing throughout our City.