



**10.22.2024 - Trinity Church Testimony – Subcommittee on Zoning and Franchises– City of Yes for Housing Opportunity Hearing**

To Chair Riley and Members of the Subcommittee on Zoning and Franchises:

Good afternoon, Chair Riley, and members of the subcommittee. My name is Thehbia Hiwot, and I serve as the Managing Director of Housing and Homelessness at Trinity Church, a Parish in the City of New York. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today on the City of Yes for Housing Opportunity initiative.

Trinity Church is an Episcopal church located in Lower Manhattan, with a congregation of more than 1,600 parishioners, representing all five boroughs of New York City. Our congregation reflects the ethnic, racial, and economic diversity that defines our city. As part of our mission, Trinity is deeply committed to breaking the cycle of housing insecurity and mass homelessness.

We believe that homelessness is, at its core, a housing problem. Homelessness is a systemic issue rooted in the mismatch between the demand for affordable homes and insufficient supply. Trinity Church supports organizations that address this crisis, including advocating for responsible zoning changes to spur the development of affordable housing. In 2023, Trinity awarded \$13.9 million in grants to New York nonprofits focused on housing and homelessness. In addition, Trinity supports faith-based institutions locally, nationally, and internationally to leverage their assets for community benefit and sustainability through robust technical assistance and mission real estate development funding.

The City of Yes for Housing Opportunity plan has the potential to address the housing crisis in a significant way by allowing for incremental but meaningful increases in housing supply across all neighborhoods. By encouraging every community to contribute, we can collectively make a substantial impact without overburdening any one area. From supporting organizations building senior housing on the Upper West Side to local community development corporations creating affordable homes with onsite amenities for families in Sunset Park, we continue to see the need for an increased supply of homes suitable for our diverse city.

A critical aspect of the plan is its support for faith-based organizations to better utilize their properties to provide housing and other community benefits, while generating the income needed for repairs and sustainability. Specifically, it would:

- Allow faith-based organizations to convert underutilized buildings, such as old convents and school buildings, into housing that meets critical needs in their communities.
- Simplify the process for building housing on faith-based organization campuses that have available land, facilitating the development of housing where it is most needed.
- Facilitate the building of three-to-five-story buildings on faith-based organization property in low-density areas that are near transit or located on main streets with commercial uses, ensuring that housing development is aligned with smart growth principles.
- Expand the city's existing program that allows landmarks to transfer unused development rights to nearby sites, enabling more faith-based organizations to benefit from this opportunity.

Through Trinity's Mission Real Estate Development initiative, we have seen how similar efforts in states like California and cities like Seattle have encouraged faith-based institutions to provide ministry to their communities through affordable housing.

By addressing the availability of affordable housing, we can make real progress in reducing homelessness and ensuring that every New Yorker has the opportunity to live in a stable, secure home. Providing more affordable housing gives individuals and families a foundation from which they can pursue education, employment, and overall well-being, ultimately breaking the cycle of poverty and housing insecurity. As such, Trinity Church strongly supports these reforms and sees them as essential to building a more equitable and sustainable future for all New Yorkers. We have a moral duty to address our city's housing and homelessness crisis. City of Yes is an appropriate policy response to address this pressing moral imperative.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify today. We look forward to collaborating with the city and other stakeholders to ensure that the City of Yes for Housing Opportunity initiative becomes a reality.