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Subject: Written Comment to the Charter Revision Commission

To the New York City Charter Revision Commission,

Please accept this letter as my formal comment in response to the Interim Report (the Report) released by the Charter Revision Commission (the Commission) on July 1, 2025. The Report lists five ballot proposals to be voted on by the general public as part of the general election this November, as well as a sixth idea that is still under consideration by the Commission. I write to express my opposition to Ballot Questions 1 through 3.

The Report references repeatedly the public participation and stakeholder engagement over the last six months that have influenced these final five proposals. However, Mayor Adams stated the purpose and priority of this Commission at the very outset of its convening: to facilitate housing development citywide, and to reduce the power of local voices in favor of a more centralized rationale for development and land use decisions in the five boroughs. The Mayor has made clear that his favored approach to addressing our city's affordability crisis is to weaken democracy through an unregulated influx of housing development by an unleashed private market.

There is unanimous agreement that housing affordability is the biggest issue facing New Yorkers: the majority of New Yorkers are rent burdened, incomes have stagnated, and rents have skyrocketed even in the neighborhoods that have built thousands of new units in the last decade. Displacement is occurring at historic levels, disrupting the very fabric of our city, and changing who it serves. Only a fraction of new housing construction is income-restricted.

Instead of holding developers accountable to their empty promises of affordable housing, ramping up tenant protections to stop mass evictions, or fully funding the building of new and the renovation of existing affordable housing, this Commission looks to strip away public oversight over the real estate industry completely. The ULURP process, while not perfect, is the one chance our Council, Community Boards, and the general public have to weigh in on how our City dictates development. The vast majority of projects avoid this process already; only those who ask for more than zoning currently allows must follow ULURP. But according to the flawed logic of this Commission, New Yorkers themselves are the greatest obstacle to affordable housing - not the endless greed of the real estate industry. It is ridiculous to blame a democratic

review process, which applies to only a fraction of total development, as a scapegoat for an affordability crisis marked by real estate oligarchy and public sector cowardice.

ULURP was brought into being by a Charter Revision Commission, at a time when the infamous Board of Estimate ruled New York, not New Yorkers. Now, we have a democratically elected Council, who have the power to hold the Mayor accountable on some of the city's most serious issues through legislation, the municipal budget, and land use. 50 years later, this Commission aims to reconcentrate that power, undermining the Council's land use authority and challenging the very principles of our local government.

This Commission proposes to remove a significant number of land use applications from Council jurisdiction, and some from the ULURP process entirely. Additionally, one measure proposes to establish an appeal board of only three elected officials with the power to reverse virtually any land use decision by the Council. Completely undermining any influence of the Council, and by extension eliminating the voice of the New Yorkers who voted for them, this Appeals Board is eerily reminiscent of the Board of Estimate, an ominous nod to an autocratic regime that greenlit the demolition and displacement of entire neighborhoods and communities in the name of "better planning."

At a time when our very democracy is on the line, New York City must not villainize the public as the enemy of public good. Instead, we must recognize how all of us lose when we allow decisions to be made behind closed doors, where corruption and pay-to-play are already well-documented. Good government should always be subject to healthy skepticism; our city, its charter and system of governance must continually evolve and adapt to better serve and represent New Yorkers. But what is being proposed only serves to concentrate power, to take our City back to a time of Tammany Hall type politics, defang our codified measures of accountability and public participation, and allow a select few to steamroll our city in favor of whichever private interests to whom they may be indebted.

Aside from the blatant legal controversy of these proposals, from unequal representation to arbitrary and unjust retribution, this report represents a fundamental divergence from participatory policymaking or even a sound separation of powers. These proposals are fundamentally undemocratic, woefully mirroring the kind of constitutional reengineering unfolding within our country's federal government today.

That people have a say in the future of their communities is fundamental to the execution of local democracy. When their democratically elected representatives are removed from this decision making, the only voices that are left are those of private industry and profit.