

Thank you for that introduction!

It is a pleasure to be here at the AIA New York Honors and Awards Luncheon, speaking to an organization whose members are fiercely dedicated to the mission of improving public life and civic engagement --

Particularly through architecture, planning, and urban design to build a more adaptable, equitable, and livable city.

In partnering with the AIA for almost 25 years, it's also a mission to which I have dedicated much of my own career.

I was proud to spend a decade of my life after 9/11 devoted to rebuilding Lower Manhattan.

I also chaired Community Board 1, served as one of the five founding board members of the Perelman Performing Arts Centre, and served on the jury that selected the 9/11 memorial — advocating for a design that brought the site up to grade and insisting that the master design for ground zero included a cultural component.

And now, as Speaker of the City Council, it's a dedication I have brought with me to City Hall, too.

When I was sworn in as Speaker on January 7th, I spoke about how we had an exceptional opportunity to take the Council into a new era. A proactive era. An era of initiative and ingenuity.

Because we cannot achieve our vision for a more affordable, more livable city with a strategy of passivity.

One hundred days into this new session, we have taken that era by storm and laid a firm foundation for the next four years – and the numbers paint a clear picture of that historic productivity.

We've introduced 1,200 pieces of legislation – more than any Council has done in its first 100 days –

And we've passed 111 bills, including 17 overrides of vetoes from the previous mayoral administration – which is more than in the past decade combined.

Today, we take the next step in the execution of our vision as we introduce the first piece of our proactive agenda on land use and housing.

Creating more housing, at every level, means more opportunities for New Yorkers to stay, grow, and work here.

It means our neighbors will no longer be pushed out of the city they grew up in, built a life in, and planned a future in.

Traditionally, the Council has sat back and awaited proposals from the mayor's office before considering whether to approve housing developments – either on individual sites or in the context of wider neighborhood-level rezonings.

But THIS Council knows we can't sit back and wait. We have our own ideas, our own vision on how to improve things.

And to make that vision a reality, we need real leadership – and real leadership focused on innovative solutions.

So right now, I am proud to announce that we are forming what we believe to be the first of its kind: a Council Advisory Group on Housing Affordability.

This group of experts and advocates will shape, guide, and inform the Council's proposals on proactive policies to confront the housing crisis.

The advisory group will be led by our three esteemed co-chairs:

Barika Williams, Executive Director of the Association for Neighborhood & Housing Development;

Gary LaBarbera, President of the Building and Construction Trades Council of Greater New York; and

James Simmons III, CEO and Founder of Asland Capital Partners.

As you all know, the current environment for the planning, construction, and preservation of housing in our city is both frustratingly inefficient and extremely challenging to navigate.

But those are challenges we can overcome.

By bringing together this group of committed and talented individuals -- everyone from architects and engineers to contractors and fair housing activists -- we will ensure that no idea or opportunity is left off the table, no matter how large -- or in some cases, how small.

And that's exactly where we'll start -- because every inch of space in our city is a site we can use to tackle the housing shortage.

I'm sure everyone here has walked along a block lined with homes and apartments, and every so often you come upon a noticeable gap --

Something that reminds you of a child's missing tooth in an otherwise grinning smile.

They are voids that are frequently full of weeds, dotted with trash, or a friendly rat scurrying about that makes you wonder, ‘My god, how did that get so big?’

The proper names for the voids are simply ‘small lots,’ but there are *thousands* of them across the city – many of which are under-utilized or abandoned entirely.

They are often quite narrow or oddly shaped, and for a city where a plot of land can be remarkably valuable, they are perhaps the most unloved parcels around.

Yet we don’t have to accept the status quo, nor should we expect that these lots remain vacant forever.

Instead, we can take steps to help transform them into housing for New Yorkers – and we can do it with relative ease by making minor changes to New York City’s Construction Code.

For decades, we have relied on these regulations to ensure that our buildings are developed and maintained to prioritize safe and livable environments of our residents.

They are important, to be sure, but like any set of regulations, they must be re-evaluated and updated over time.

As part of our proactive agenda on housing, the City Council intends to identify specific reforms to the Construction Code that would unlock the potential to build housing *specifically* on these small, privately-owned lots.

The reforms we are considering would improve design efficiencies to increase the percentage of a building's space available for living – making the development of housing, for the first time, viable to finance and build.

Adopting these reforms would spur the development of new housing that can be built as-of-right today -- without laboring through the expensive, time-consuming, and burdensome rezoning process.

And while these lots are, by definition, small, with widths that are between 17 and 25 feet, we're not just talking about a couple of extra housing units here and there.

We have nearly 2,850 of these lots that are currently bare, either serving as parking lots or functioning far below their potential for units of housing.

And when it's all added up in a city this vast, we're talking about unlocking the potential for as many as 35,000 new homes across all five boroughs.

We're talking about revitalizing our neighborhoods and rebuilding our communities facing blight and abandonment.

We're also talking about adding tax dollars to our revenue stream and creating new economic opportunities for landowners.

And finally, we're talking about improving quality of life, not just for our children, but for our children's children.

Not just planting seeds for the next decade, but helping New Yorkers lay down roots that last for the next century.

And we want the people in this very room to be a part of the change we hope to bring about, to help lead the vision we are eager to implement.

What we want to build is more than simply a few new homes.

What we want to build is a city that prides itself as much on the marvels of Manhattan's skyline as on the homes that developers can soon build in these narrow lots.

All of them are wonders of architecture in their own ways. And there is no architecture without architects like you.

In fact, if this idea sounds familiar to anyone sitting here, there's a reason for that.

This group -- the American Institute of Architects in New York -- was instrumental in coming up with the analysis that yielded this proposal.

And I want to especially shout out architect Andre Soluri for your pivotal role in helping to executing on this idea,

along with the City Council's planning and Land Use Division, and the leadership of Land Use Committee Chair Kevin Riley, who is here with us today.

And I hope it sends the clear message that not only is the City Council listening to the experts when they have innovative solutions like this one –

But we also have the capacity and the drive to bring them to life.

The fight to create a more affordable and more livable New York is not won alone – but rather by working *together*.

And *together*, we can make the greatest city in the world even greater.

Thank you.