



Zoning proposals: Modernizing zoning regs with a look at how it will affect Queens neighborhoods

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Mayor de Blasio, as part of his five-borough, 10-year housing plan, wants to create or preserve 200,000 affordable units. 160,000 of these units, he hopes will come from new development. To achieve this goal, the city has proposed new zoning proposals. I will outline them in this article.

According to the Department of City Planning, the reason for these new modernized zoning proposals is due to the belief that the current zoning regulations are outdated. The city believes this often impedes production of new affordable housing units. The four primary goals of the proposed changes are:

1. To remove barriers that constrains housing production and raise costs.
2. To encourage better quality buildings that contribute to the fabric of neighborhoods.
3. To promote affordable senior housing, addressing the aging populace.
4. Reduce unnecessary new construction parking requirements.

The mayor hopes that by removing outdated provisions and modernizing others, zoning will foster diverse and livable neighborhoods with the development of new high-quality mixed-income housing. These proposals look to increase the heights of new residential buildings. For 95% of contextually zoned medium and high density districts, an additional five ft. will be allowed. In some of the higher density areas, 10 or 15 ft. of additional height will be allowed. If the developer chooses to build affordable housing for seniors, additional floor area and flexibility will be allowed; as much as three to four more stories. The affordable senior housing will also come into play in low-density districts. The proposal will allow for this type of development as well as lower parking requirements and award higher floor to area ratios (FAR).

Essentially, these new zoning proposals look to modify the building envelopes by:

1. Height: Increasing maximum heights from five ft. to 15 ft. to ensure that all permitted floor areas can fit. This will allow for better building designs.
2. Setbacks: Measure the upper floor setback from the street line, removing the penalty for buildings that setback at the street level. This allows for better interior layouts and reduces construction costs.
3. Corner Lots: Loosen lot coverage requirements that make housing construction unnecessarily difficult, especially on irregularly shaped lots.

Currently, when a developer wants to build, they are also constrained by outdated parking requirements. The new proposals look to get rid of this obstacle by eliminating parking requirements for affordable housing near transit and reducing the requirement in other areas.

What can this mean to you? Let's say you own a site that is currently zoned R6A in Astoria, Queens. The current maximum height you can go up is 70 ft. Under the new proposal, you would be allowed an extra five ft., bringing the max height to 75 ft. If you choose to build affordable senior housing or a long term care facility, you will be allowed a total of 85 ft. (or eight stories). If your property is zoned

R7A in an inclusionary housing area, you can currently go up 85 ft. (or eight stories), under the new proposal, you would be allowed to build up to 105 ft. (or 10 stories). A solid increase.

This proposal will also affect certain Special Districts. For example, in the Long Island City Mixed-Use Special District, the new proposal will allow for residential and community facility uses in the same floor and will remove the special corner lot coverage rule in the Queens Plaza Sub district. It will also modify maximum height restrictions.

In the Astoria and Flushing, Queens Waterfront areas, the new proposals will allow for non-profit residences for the elderly and will also look to update height restrictions.

Before this gets approved it has to go through the city's environmental and land use review processes. This includes public hearings and recommendations from all community boards. It then goes to the city planning commission for more public hearings and votes.

To go along with this plan, the mayor wants his 421a tax abatement changes (backed by REBNY), his new mansion tax (on residential property over \$1.75 million and over \$5 million) and his pro-tenant/anti-landlord rent regulation changes to go through as well.

This is an extremely crucial period in the housing and commercial real estate markets. It will be an interesting summer to say the least. Stay tuned.

Rubin Isak is the CEO & co-founder of Falco & Isak Realty Services, Queens, N.Y.

New York Real Estate Journal - 17 Accord Park Drive #207, Norwell MA 02061 - (781) 878-4540