



Vision for a Better City

25 Ideas for a Healthy and Safe New York

Foreword

They say New York City is thriving – record job numbers, the safest big city in the country.

But beneath the headlines, urgent challenges persist. Housing isn't being built fast enough. Transit improvements aren't keeping pace. Too many New Yorkers feel unsafe – whether from traffic on the streets or concerns on the subway. Mental health struggles and loneliness are rising.

The very values that make New York a city of opportunity and belonging are at risk. For generations, it has been a place where you can start fresh, build a home, strive and achieve greatness – but that promise is slipping away.

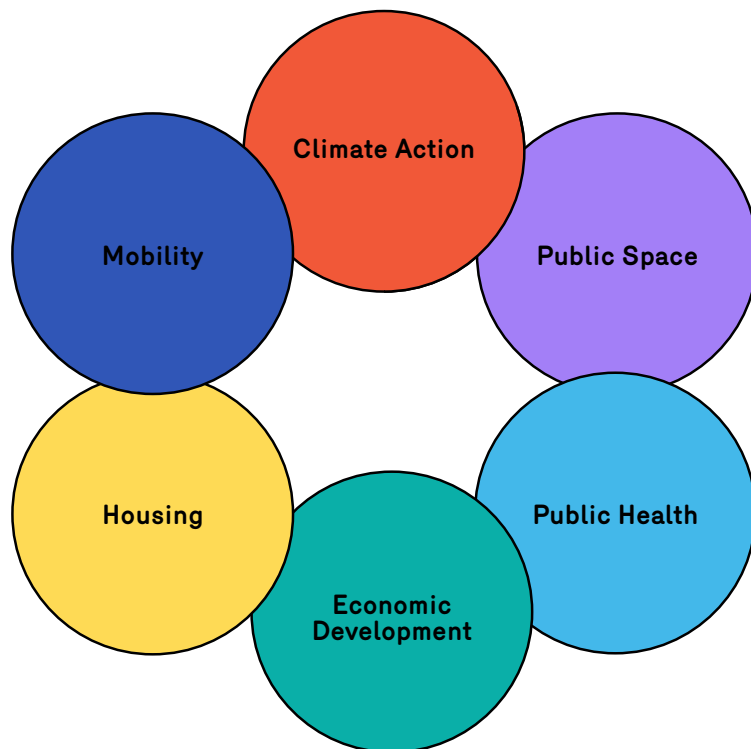
With national politics shifting, these core values face new threats. In this moment of uncertainty, New York needs bold, visionary leadership to tackle these challenges and build a city that works for everyone.

Vision for a Better City is Urban Design Forum's platform of ideas for New York's next leaders – offering ambitious, actionable, and pragmatic recommendations to improve quality of life for all New Yorkers.

At Urban Design Forum, we believe every New Yorker should thrive in a healthy neighborhood, with a stable home, dignified work, safe and reliable transit, vibrant public spaces, and a rich cultural life. Our built environment – our neighborhoods, buildings, streets, and infrastructure – shapes the health, culture, and economy of our city.

Too often, urban design feels disconnected from daily life. But it doesn't have to be. Thoughtful design is key to building a city we're proud to call home. It can tackle multiple challenges at once, from bringing neighbors together to addressing climate change. This document lays out a vision to make that happen.

Vision for a Better City is built around six essential pillars that define thriving New York City neighborhoods: Housing, Public Space, Mobility, Economic Development, Public Health, and Climate Action.



While these issue areas are distinct, they are deeply interconnected. Our city's next leader must bring together experts with both local and technical knowledge in each of these areas to improve the lives of New Yorkers. Good housing shapes our health and ability to participate in an economy. Public spaces create community and help mitigate climate risks. Mobility connects New Yorkers to jobs, health services, and one another. A comprehensive approach to these issues will build a stronger New York and a more livable city.

This platform is a product of New Yorkers from so many backgrounds across every borough. We engaged our network of over 1,100 civic leaders who design, build, and care for a better city: urban designers, architects, engineers, developers, lawyers, tenant organizers, health and sustainability experts, public space stewards, planners, policymakers, and community organizers. They are a microcosm of our beautiful city. We helped them research and refine these ideas over the past five years, and gathered over the last few months to debate the best ideas for the next administration.

New York City's future depends on leadership that is willing to think creatively, act boldly, and work collaboratively. Here in New York, the mayor has the power and the tools to dramatically improve quality of life and affordability for all New Yorkers.

A better city is possible. It's time to build it – together.

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Housing

Housing is the mother of all problems in New York City. Nearly 130,000 New Yorkers cycled through shelters last year, thousands more sleep on the streets, and 1 in 8 public school children have experienced homelessness. At the same time, over half of New Yorkers are rent burdened. Working families are being priced out, and essential workers – teachers, nurses, and transit operators – face impossible commutes or are forced to leave the city altogether.

The consequences are dire: Without enough affordable homes, neighborhoods lose their culture, businesses struggle to hire and retain workers, and billions in taxpayer dollars are spent managing crises instead of building a stronger future.

Our next mayor must act boldly – not just to house those in need, but to ensure every New Yorker can afford to live where they work. That means unleashing new housing of all kinds, protecting tenants from displacement, overcoming entrenched opposition, and embracing proven solutions from cities around the world. Housing isn't just a moral issue – it's an economic necessity for the city's survival.

Idea #1 Build Broader Buy-in

New development often faces opposition from local residents, from concerns about displacement or irrational fear of new neighbors. The next mayor must reform the planning process to ensure that every neighborhood can support new housing growth and contribute to our collective citywide housing goals.

- **Say yes to comprehensive planning:** Empower a dedicated city office to create a strategic citywide growth framework aligning neighborhood needs with citywide priorities, infrastructure investments, and government spending.
- **Invite local leaders to step up:** Ask every Council Member and Community Board to shape neighborhood plans that align with the city's housing goals and can guide future development.
- **Elevate underrepresented voices:** Partner with and compensate community organizations to mobilize their constituencies and lead education and outreach efforts during community planning initiatives.
- **Communicate proudly about change:** Revive neighborhood-level notification systems to inform residents well in advance of upcoming projects and provide actionable steps for meaningful community input.
- **Focus on metrics that matter:** Shift housing performance metrics for agencies to emphasize tangible resident outcomes, such as improved housing quality, affordability, and reduced shelter stays.

Idea #2 Help New Yorkers stay in their homes

Every New Yorker deserves a stable, safe home, which requires stronger tenant protections to prevent displacement and improve housing conditions. At the same time, the City must carefully investigate the impacts of these measures on honest landlords who face rising costs and the challenges of maintaining aging buildings.

- **Strengthen tenant protections:** Expand Right to Counsel by increasing income eligibility caps by boosting legal service funding, enhancing outreach efforts, and providing affirmative legal resources for tenants facing harassment or exploitation.
- **Pair incentives with new safety and environmental regulations:** Expand low-interest or forgivable loans and tax incentives for landlords that undertake critical home repairs and upgrades to maintain affordability for renters.

- **Fix the city’s broken property tax system:** Overhaul the unfair property tax system that disadvantages multifamily housing, to eliminate geographic inequities, allow landlords to keep costs lower, and ease the burden on renters.
- **Protect the Right to Shelter:** Preserve New York City’s long-standing legal Right to Shelter, especially for asylum seekers and other new arrivals.
- **Expand CityFHEPS vouchers:** Strengthen rental assistance programs to support New Yorkers at risk of housing insecurity, while enabling landlords to flag at-risk tenants for accelerated access to vouchers and social services.
- **Support “mom-and-pop” landlords:** Expand services and incentives for independent landlords who provide affordable housing or rent to legacy businesses, to prevent sales to corporate entities.
- **Make a strategy for “crisis housing”:** Anticipate that crises happen all too often, and develop a long-term strategy for transitional housing that streamlines services to support asylum seekers, refugees, and residents – both local and international – displaced by major catastrophes.

Idea #3

Unlock all housing types and building strategies

While market-oriented initiatives like City of Yes will help increase housing supply, they alone cannot meet the diverse needs of New Yorkers across all income levels. To address the housing crisis, the next mayor must embrace a range of strategies – including market, publicly-financed, and cooperative models – to deliver deeply affordable and accessible housing citywide.

- **Calculate the true cost of the housing crisis:** Understand the total impact of housing unaffordability on the city budget, including investments in the shelter system, legal protections, vouchers and other public assistance driven by rent burdens, so you can make a forceful case to redirect public dollars.
- **Make homes easier to build:** Reform outdated building codes such as dual-stairwell and stringent elevator requirements that drive up the cost of producing medium-density housing.
- **Fund community land trusts:** Deeply fund the City’s CLT initiative to incubate and assist neighborhood-based and permanently affordable community land trusts.
- **Create a land bank:** Create a land bank to acquire distressed properties for social housing development led by CLTs and nonprofit developers.
- **Fast-track community-defined growth:** Expedite approvals for housing projects that deliver clear and measurable community benefits, guided by existing community plans led by local organizations, Council Members, or Community Boards.
- **Incentivize office conversions with affordable housing:** Advocate for state tax incentives to promote affordability in new office to residential conversions.
- **Try new arrangements for older adults & families:** Shape new housing models that include design guidelines and incentives to support co-housing arrangements for caregivers and older adults.
- **Encourage long-term ownership of property:** Support housing types with long-term ownership structures to disincentivize flipping, ensure long-term investment in maintenance and sustainability, and support greater community ties within and around buildings.
- **Save NYCHA:** As federal funding for public housing declines, the City should accelerate tenant-driven decisionmaking around alternative funding options like Section 8 and the Preservation Trust to preserve public housing, while also leveraging tools such as infill development and Transferable Development Rights.

Idea #4

Staff up city agencies to run effectively

New York City's ability to deliver affordable housing is hindered by limited agency capacity and persistent administrative bottlenecks. The next mayor must right-size agency staffing, aligning talent, expertise, and resources with the City's housing goals.

- **Reform civil service:** Modernize recruitment and hiring systems to attract and retain top talent across housing agencies.
- **Increase violation enforcement:** Strengthen enforcement of housing code violations through the Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD) and reinvest fines into housing initiatives.
- **Resource social services:** Increase funding for staffing to social service agencies to support housing placement and case management services.
- **Realign leadership:** Consolidate oversight of housing and homelessness agencies under a single deputy mayor for streamlined coordination and a Housing First approach.
- **Cut red tape to build faster:** Streamline access to HPD's affordable housing financing by reducing administrative barriers.

Public Space

The next administration can take better care of our collective front yard. Parks and plazas are where we come together as New Yorkers, but too many are in rough shape after years of deferred maintenance and neglect. We are barely investing in keeping our commercial corridors – our neighborhoods’ main streets – thriving and clean.

Our next mayor should demand that all the agencies overseeing our public spaces work better together. It’s time for a new strategy that ensures every neighborhood has strong local partner organizations taking care of our shared spaces, keeping them clean and safe, and bringing them to life more often.

And we can do so much more to make our public spaces reflect the spirit of our neighborhoods. The City can make it a lot easier for New Yorkers to create markets, festivals, and public art that better connect us to our neighbors, drive economic activity and tourism, and introduce us to the mix of cultures that make New York City vibrant.

Idea #5 Build a strong citywide network of local partners to improve public spaces

Communities that face historic inequities often encounter significant barriers to transforming and activating their public spaces, unlike neighborhoods supported by well-funded conservancies. The next mayor should build partnerships with local leaders and organizations, paired with sustained public investments, to foster responsive, neighborhood-driven public space stewardship.

- **Create a Fund for the Public Realm:** Collect and reinvest flexible resources from private, public, and philanthropic sectors to support public space projects in low-income neighborhoods.
- **Fund community engagement:** Provide resources for trusted community organizations to support dedicated community engagement around city-led projects to better champion resident buy-in, expanding on models like the Department of Transportation’s (DOT) Community Partners Program.
- **Build local capacity:** Fund capacity-building programs and resources like educational portals, peer-to-peer learning initiatives, and training that upskill community partners on issues like fundraising, public space management, and permitting procedures.
- **Partner with anchor institutions and private sector partners:** Strike up partnerships between health institutions, universities, museums, and NYC-based corporations to help maintain and program vibrant public spaces while ensuring local community groups remain in control.
- **Fund more culture on our streets:** Increase DOT and Department of Parks & Recreation (DPR) grants for local artists and arts organizations to install culturally relevant art and programming, like night markets and cultural showcases, in public spaces.
- **Amplify the minimum standard for Open Streets:** Establish a minimum allocation of \$250k per corridor to support staffing and implementation, ensuring consistent and effective execution of Open Streets initiatives.

Idea #6

Design public spaces that are livable, vibrant and safe

Well-designed, well-managed and well-maintained public spaces are essential for improving the quality of life of residents. The City must lead an inclusive design of public space infrastructure and channel strategic investments for stewardship to address growing challenges like flooding, extreme heat, and public safety.

- **Improve nighttime lighting:** Improve lighting to enhance safety after dark, while minimizing light pollution to protect biodiversity and resident well-being.
- **Reclaim parking for trash collection:** Free up sidewalk space for pedestrians by designating parking spots for on-street trash containers shared by blocks or groups of buildings.
- **Public bathrooms for all:** Lead a citywide initiative to expand bathroom access by renovating and building new facilities in city parks, investing in low-cost and innovative models like Automated Public Toilets (APTs), or exploring zoning bonuses that include restrooms as community benefits.
- **Create new Climate Corridors:** Install new streets that mitigate extreme heat and flooding, improve air quality, and make way for bus and bike lanes.
- **Increase parks funding:** Allocate 1% of the City's budget to the Department of Parks & Recreation to support existing parks programming, operations, capital projects and maintenance.
- **Invest in holistic homelessness outreach:** Fund programs deploying trained professionals to provide mental health support and services across the subway, public parks, and streets, meeting people "where they're at" and aimed at reducing stigma.
- **Build buy-in for public space projects:** Expand Summer Streets, Trick-or-Treat Streets, and other light-touch activations to showcase the benefits of pedestrianized spaces and inspire broader support.
- **Speed up capital projects:** Demand all capital agencies on accelerating procurement, design review, and interagency coordination to transform parks, plazas and streets on shorter timelines.

Idea #7

Prioritize long-term care of public spaces

It's easy to celebrate new public space projects, but the real challenge is ensuring they are well-maintained for years to come. The next mayor must commit to long-term funding and support for public spaces – especially in neighborhoods, parks, and commercial corridors that lack the resources of major conservancies or BIDs.

- **Commit dedicated funding for maintenance:** Dedicate a percentage of the City's capital budget to public space maintenance, prioritizing historically underinvested neighborhoods.
- **Expand existing support for maintenance and activation:** Double contract funding for public space maintenance and activation partners, like the Hort and Street Lab, to support low-capacity community organizations.
- **Baseline and expand public space grants:** Expand the DOT Public Space Equity Program to fund maintenance and improvements in most neighborhoods of the city.
- **Deepen funding for underfunded parks:** Expand the Community Parks Initiative to provide targeted maintenance for historically underfunded parks.
- **Advance racial equity in public space investments:** Use existing racial equity frameworks, such as the Office of Equity's TRIE neighborhoods, to prioritize capital investments in historically underinvested communities.

Idea #8

Make it easier to throw a block party with your neighbors

Neighborhood groups and residents are eager to shape their public spaces, but complex permitting, fragmented agency oversight, and limited funding make it difficult for communities to bring their ideas to life. The next mayor can empower neighborhood-led projects by streamlining bureaucracy and strengthening coordination among city agencies.

- **Fast-track permitting:** Simplify the permitting process for community organizations, allow rain-dates for permits, and fast-track or provide multi-year permits for public space partners that have previously demonstrated success.
- **Tap light poles:** Streamline processes with DOT and Con Edison to enable easier access to lighting and power for local organizations to activate public spaces.
- **Staff up public space agencies:** Increase staffing at agencies like Street Activity Permit Office (SAPO), DOT's Office of Livable Streets and SBS Neighborhood Development Division to facilitate public space permitting across more neighborhoods.
- **Empower the Chief Public Realm Officer:** Grant the Chief Public Realm Officer coordinating authority over key capital agencies like Parks, DOT, and SBS to oversee and expedite the execution of public space programs, ensuring equitable funding and timely delivery of capital projects.
- **Connect public space agencies:** Task the Chief Public Realm Officer to dedicate regular coordination across agencies that work in the public realm, especially agencies like the Fire Department and Police Department that oversee public space permitting.
- **Bolster and improve existing programs:** Enhance existing public space programs like Open Streets and Culture Streets by strengthening logistical support from DOT and the Department of Cultural Affairs (DCLA) to support smaller arts organizations and individual artists.

The next administration should take back our streets. During the pandemic, we nearly succeeded in transforming city streets for dining, shopping, culture, and greening, but our progress has ground to a halt. Our forward motion on new bike and bus lanes has slowed considerably as naysayers pushed for parking.

Our next mayor needs to drum up new political and grassroots support for safer, greener, and livelier city streets. Every child deserves a safe route to school. Every commuter should be able to hop on a quick city bus instead of sitting in traffic. Every commercial corridor should hum with foot traffic.

And though we've seen a few great transformative street projects at the core of Manhattan, most of the city has only seen temporary treatments, paint, planters, and barricades. Our next mayor needs to level us up, pivot to permanent, and solidify the progress we've sketched on our streets.

Idea #9

Save more lives through better street design

The city needs to deepen its commitment to eradicating traffic violence and keeping every commuter, delivery worker, shopper and schoolchild safe on our streets. The next mayor must redesign our streets to ensure safer neighborhoods at every corner and along every corridor.

- **Launch pedestrian corridors:** Design pedestrian-oriented corridors to eliminate traffic violence, modeled after multi-street Open Streets like 34th Avenue in Queens.
- **Build community buy-in:** Launch more public education campaigns around the safety benefits of street improvements to combat opposition to life-saving projects, especially to inform the public on how many lives have been saved by Vision Zero to date.
- **Make schools the heart of our street design revolution:** Center schools in our street design efforts, from supporting organizer-led “bike buses” to supporting DOT’s School Streets program with logistical support for organizers.
- **Don't settle for temporary:** Shift the focus from short-term, low-cost interventions to permanent infrastructure investments for plazas and bike lanes, directing capital agencies to prioritize lasting public space transformations.
- **Allocate street space for people:** Develop low-car-traffic neighborhoods in transit-rich areas, drawing inspiration from Barcelona, London, and Paris, while leading strong community engagement campaigns to showcase the health, economic, and safety benefits.
- **Create bicycle superhighways:** Revive plans to build bike superhighways beneath highways and bridges, featuring clear wayfinding and seamless connections to existing feeder routes.

Idea #10

Enforce safer streets for all

New York City’s push for safer, more walkable streets is failing without strong traffic enforcement, as reckless driving and illegal parking go unchecked. The next mayor must align agencies on enforcement and hold drivers accountable to keep streets safe for everyone.

- **Automate enforcement:** Expand automated bus lane enforcement to boost speed and reliability while targeting double-parked cars that obstruct traffic flow.
- **Crackdown on dangerous car drivers:** Strengthen automated enforcement for speeding, red-light running, excessive honking, and illegal plate coverings.
- **Address reckless e-bikes:** Ensure safer sidewalks for pedestrians by enforcing clear regulations and expanding bike parking for delivery drivers.
- **Clear bike lanes and sidewalks:** Penalize vehicles blocking bike lanes, crosswalks, and sidewalks, including city agency vehicles.

- **Reform parking and curb use:** Adjust pricing and enforcement of curb space to prioritize street space and safety for pedestrians and bikers.
- **Minimize oversized cars in the city:** Advocate for federal and state regulations and incentives requiring safer truck and SUV designs to protect pedestrians and cyclists, drawing on models like London’s FORS (Fleet Operator Recognition Scheme).

Idea #11

Speed up city buses

New York City’s bus network is essential to reducing emissions and keeping our economy moving. The next mayor must invest in faster, more reliable bus service to encourage public transit use, ease opposition to Congestion Pricing, and build support for a fairer, more efficient transportation system.

- **Build dedicated bus lanes:** Draw from examples like Manhattan’s 14th Street bus treatment to bring dedicated bus corridors to every neighborhood with slow bus routes and limited subway access.
- **Develop a Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) Network:** Use congestion pricing revenue to build a high-capacity regional BRT network connecting major job centers for essential work in hospitals and airports, in partnership with the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA).
- **Improve boarding experience:** Advocate to the MTA to reinstate all-door boarding to improve bus speeds and rider satisfaction.
- **Expand Congestion Pricing:** Study extending Congestion Pricing to all of Manhattan, downtown Brooklyn, and downtown Queens to further reduce congestion, while exploring ways to mitigate inequitable impacts.

Idea #12

Build the world’s cleanest transportation network

Transportation is the second-largest source of New York City’s greenhouse gas emissions. The next mayor must revamp our streets to enhance transportation options and connections, prioritize cleaner, alternative modes of transit, and reduce reliance on cars.

- **Strengthen multimodal connections:** Improve bike, bus, subway, and ferry linkages with better wayfinding, bike storage, and ADA and pedestrian-friendly transfer points.
- **Legitimize informal transit:** Recognize and permit dollar vans in neighborhoods without great subway access.
- **Simplify regional connections:** Advocate to MTA to expand OMNY to include LIRR and Metro-North to improve connections for regional workers and visitors.
- **Bring cargo bikes to every block:** Make DOT’s Commercial Cargo Bicycle Pilot permanent, and explore neighborhood-based distribution models for e-commerce and food delivery.
- **Expand water transit:** Explore ways to make waterborne transportation more accessible for commuters and delivery operations.
- **Explore innovative transit infrastructure:** Keep experimenting with emerging technologies like trackless trams and gondolas to improve public transit in areas not serviced by subways.

Economic Development

New York City's economy may be record-breaking, but too many workers, small businesses, and families struggle to keep up. The next mayor must focus on building an economy that works for all New Yorkers – not just those in the city's core.

That means investing in good jobs, affordable housing, and reliable public services to close the gap between the city's wealthiest and lowest-income neighborhoods. Expanding job hubs outside Manhattan, strengthening commercial corridors, and improving transit connections will help every neighborhood grow and thrive.

A stronger economy starts with investing in our shared infrastructure. Well-maintained parks, clean streets, reliable transit, and safe public spaces don't just attract businesses – they create stability, opportunity, and a better quality of life for all New Yorkers.

Idea #13

Build pathways to the green economy

The green economy offers a massive opportunity for wealth creation, especially for communities that have been historically left out. The next mayor must invest in training programs and support for small businesses to ensure all New Yorkers can access these high-paying jobs.

- **Expand green job training and apprenticeships:** Strengthen training programs to put more New Yorkers to work on energy retrofits, sustainable construction, and waste innovation, with a focus on non-degree-based skills like building insulation and electrical work.
- **Strengthen the circular construction economy:** Support a material reuse and sustainable construction industry by locating waste reuse accelerator programs for small businesses within industrial business zones.
- **Leverage public purchasing power:** Use city contracts to seed and scale innovative green technologies, building on the success of New York City Housing Authority's heat pump challenge.
- **Proliferate green small businesses:** Increase access to capital for small businesses and minority- and women-owned businesses by partnering with nonprofits like Nonprofit Finance Fund and Grameen.

Idea #14

Bolster main streets in every neighborhood

Thriving commercial corridors are the backbone of strong neighborhoods, offering essential goods, services, and jobs. Yet in too many historically underinvested communities, vacant storefronts, neglected public spaces, and a lack of resources have left business districts struggling.

- **Strengthen community development groups:** Increase baseline funding for small Business Improvement Districts (BIDs), merchant groups, and other local organizations that support commercial corridors in low- to moderate-income neighborhoods, with additional grants for merchant organizing and BID formation.
- **Baseline and expand public space grants:** Triple the Department of Small Business Services (SBS) Neighborhood Development and Department of Transportation (DOT) Open Streets grants, ensuring they are multi-year and baselined to account for the time needed for effective implementation.
- **Marshal public space investments:** Fund streetscape improvements – like benches, lighting, and pedestrian plazas – in historically underfunded commercial corridors to drive foot traffic and attract new business.

- **Preserve legacy businesses:** Offer tax abatements and zoning incentives to help long-standing small businesses remain in place.
- **Cut red tape for public space activations:** Streamline permitting to allow small businesses, BIDs, and community organizations to host markets and events in public plazas and main streets.
- **Improve curbside loading and delivery:** Expand loading zones to support small business delivery and reduce street congestion.
- **Support equitable containerization:** Provide funding, technical and logistical support for small BIDs in low- to median-income neighborhoods to support trash containerization, while allowing flexibility during implementation and rollout.
- **Fill empty storefronts:** Explore ways that the Department of Buildings (DOB) and other agencies can accelerate the process for re-tenanting vacant storefronts to improve a sense of safety along commercial corridors.

Idea #15

Make New York City livable for working families

New York must remain a city where families can afford to live and build their futures. That means the next mayor must reduce housing costs, food costs, improve connectivity to jobs, and ensure access to affordable childcare.

- **Recognize that housing is holding us back:** Embrace a range of strategies – including market, publicly-financed, and cooperative models – to deliver deeply affordable and accessible housing citywide, especially in high capacity neighborhoods with rich transit.
- **Expand childcare facilities:** Reform outdated storefront regulations and provide targeted business support to increase the availability of childcare services, particularly in underserved neighborhoods.
- **Adjust for the True Cost of Living:** Lead efforts to understand “Trust Cost of Living” for New Yorkers, advocating for adjustments in programs like Area Median Income (AMI) brackets to better reflect the realities of low-income, low-middle, and middle-income residents.
- **Create affordable food retailers:** Create funding opportunities for cooperative markets and nonprofit, locally-based food operators by offering microgrants or financial incentives to help with start-up costs.
- **Ensure compliance with existing fresh food incentives:** Expand eligibility for FRESH Tax Incentive Areas and enforce strict compliance with program requirements, ensuring that food retailers meet standards for affordability, freshness, and locally sourced offerings.
- **Expand Fair Fares:** Align economic opportunities with transportation access by providing transit subsidies for healthcare and essential workers, who often endure the longest commutes in the city.

Idea #16

Bring jobs closer to home

The rise of remote work and expanded retail outside Manhattan has reshaped how New Yorkers engage with their neighborhoods. The next mayor must invest in these areas to foster diverse local economies, support industry growth, and create job opportunities closer to home.

- **Shape neighborhoods where you can live and work:** Strengthen the hyperlocal by creating vibrant, walkable, mixed-use neighborhoods that integrate work, retail, housing, and community services.
- **Boost new job centers:** Invest in transportation and infrastructure improvements to better connect emerging job hubs in outer boroughs like Flushing and Jamaica with each other and residential neighborhoods.
- **Locate business growth in transit-rich neighborhoods:** Identify key transportation hubs outside of the Manhattan core that can sustain greater mixed-use development and attract new industries.
- **Examine the future of work:** Work with elected officials and community organizations to assess the future of Industrial Business Zones – determining where to strengthen them as job hubs with good-paying, low-barrier jobs and where rezoning could welcome new uses.
- **Revitalize office space:** Keep a close eye on commercial buildings that aren't yet feasible for residential conversion to strengthen incentives through the City's M-CORE program, helping commercial landlords reduce vacancies by funding transformative office building renovations.
- **Ensure that New York remains art capital of the world:** Invest more deeply in subsidized arts spaces in every borough and leverage new development to ensure permanent affordable rent options for nonprofit cultural spaces.

New Yorkers are living shorter lives, with the lowest life expectancy in decades. While the city's economy has bounced back since the pandemic, our health has not fully recovered.

Where you live, how much you earn, the number of trees on your block, and your access to parks, transit, and fresh food all influence your life expectancy and the health challenges you face. In neighborhoods with limited access to green spaces or affordable healthcare, residents are more likely to experience chronic conditions like heart disease, diabetes, and respiratory illnesses.

And while we've moved past the pandemic, we're now grappling with an epidemic of loneliness, which is just as harmful as smoking or obesity. Studies show that social isolation increases the risk of early death by 30%.

New York City's next mayor must recognize that neighborhoods shape our public health. Stable, healthy housing can prevent chronic illnesses. Lively parks and public spaces can combat loneliness. Safe streets can keep people active. These aren't just nice things to have – they can save lives and improve the health of our most vulnerable New Yorkers.

Idea #17

Invest in healthy public spaces and mobility

The city around us can help to fight physical and mental health risks like heart disease and loneliness. The next mayor can transform our approach to planning streets to center people and expand access to green spaces in environmental justice neighborhoods.

- **Develop a Citywide Active Corridor Plan:** Amp up the City's efforts to design continuous walkable and bikeable corridors across the city to provide safe, active, and accessible alternatives to car travel.
- **Incentivize public transit:** Manifest the benefits of congestion pricing by planning an expanded and reliable bus network reducing air pollution and incentivizing physical activity.
- **Use public spaces to combat loneliness:** Expand support for Open Streets, streamline permitting, and invest in community groups that lead programming to strengthen community bonds with intergenerational walking groups, cultural festivals and markets, and public space stewardship programs.
- **Invest in public art:** Deepen investments in community-focused public art grants and initiatives, like DOHMH's NYC Mural Arts Program and DOT's Arterventions Program, aimed to reduce stigma and improve mental health through art and community collaboration.
- **Clean up toxic sites:** Expand incentives for brownfield redevelopment in low-income neighborhoods to transform contaminated land into healthier, more usable spaces.

Idea #18

Recognize that housing is healthcare

Housing access and quality can pose enormous risks to chronic stress and indoor toxins. The City must treat the housing crisis as a public health issue and bridge public health strategies with housing solutions.

- **Deliver improved indoor health through climate investments:** Communicate the co-benefits of energy efficiency upgrades and improved air quality and thermal comfort of residents, while ensuring strong affordability protections for renters with incentives and funding strategies.

- **Bring health services to housing:** Starting with NYCHA, expand programs that bring pop-up healthcare services and health education directly into communities to better serve vulnerable residents.
- **Enforce safe and quality housing:** Boost funding for the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH) and the Department of Buildings (DOB) to hold landlords accountable for maintaining habitable conditions, especially in aging and neglected housing stock.
- **Shade buildings during summer months:** To reduce heat and improve indoor comfort, install movable or permanent shading on NYCHA campuses to maximize coverage on building surfaces and apartment windows.
- **Establish a maximum indoor temperature:** Require landlords to maintain safe indoor temperatures during extreme heat to prevent heat-related illness and deaths.

Idea #19

Bring healthy food to every neighborhood

Many neighborhoods can't access nutritious food because they lack grocery stores with fresh produce and affordable farmer's markets. The City must strengthen local food systems, remove barriers to healthy food retail, and spark more urban agriculture to ensure all New Yorkers can access fresh, affordable food.

- **Expand fresh food in bodegas:** Create new connections between large distributors, local entrepreneurs like FRESCH or Bronx Salad, and bodegas to stock healthier options for customers.
- **Support community gardens and urban agriculture:** Secure land tenure for community gardens, create land trusts and invest in infrastructure for small-scale farming.
- **Improve the supply chain:** Support small-scale food processors with shared-use kitchens, processing facilities, and collaboration hubs for small food producers to scale operations and reduce costs.
- **Create affordable food retailers:** Create funding opportunities for cooperative markets and nonprofit, locally-based food operators by offering microgrants or financial incentives to help with start-up costs.
- **Activate streets and plazas for markets:** Simplify the process of turning public spaces into hubs for farmer's markets and CSA distribution.

Idea #20

Collect data to shape healthier neighborhoods

Data collection can help shape better programs that improve the health of residents, but it often overlooks how our neighborhoods impact the well-being of New Yorkers. The next mayor can expand health research and include community-led data to ensure planning decisions prioritize residents' physical and mental health.

- **Invest in participatory action research:** Invest in community-led research and train community organizations to collect data on the impacts of urban design on health and well-being.
- **Increase real-time environmental monitoring:** Deploy more air quality, flood risk, and heat sensors in public spaces and unleash data through digital kiosks or mobile apps.
- **Enhance emergency alert systems for everyday life:** Use NotifyNYC to provide targeted health alerts, including extreme heat warnings and air quality advisories.

Climate Action

The climate crisis is no longer a distant threat; it's a daily reality for New Yorkers. Rising temperatures, record rainfall, wildfires in our city parks, and smoke from afar make the impacts undeniable. Residents face heat-related illnesses, polluted air from traffic, and storms that damage homes and businesses, and disrupt transit.

New York City has the power to lead as the federal government backs down from climate leadership. The next mayor can align climate solutions with our city's core needs: investing in good-paying jobs to electrify our city and divert waste, shaping safer streets that support cleaner air and absorb heavy rainwater, and decarbonizing our buildings while preserving affordability.

By caring for our neighborhoods and built environment, we can protect our city and prepare for the challenges ahead.

Idea #21

Adapt public spaces to keep us safe from worsening weather

Many neighborhoods don't have enough trees, green infrastructure, and shade to cope with extreme rain and heat. The next mayor should demand greater investment in streets, parks, and plazas to ensure our neighborhoods can handle worsening weather.

- **Increase parks funding:** Allocate 1% of the City's budget to the Department of Parks & Recreation to support existing parks programming, operations, capital projects and green space, street trees and forestry maintenance.
- **Green playgrounds:** Marshal green infrastructure investments in schools and public play areas, like permeable pavement and native plantings.
- **Equip more city stewards:** Train and fund more stewardship groups to support green infrastructure maintenance, focusing on neighborhoods without conservancies or Business Improvement Districts (BIDs).
- **Create new Climate Corridors:** Install new streets that mitigate extreme heat and flooding, improve air quality, and make way for bus and bike lanes.
- **Develop a Citywide Biodiversity Plan:** Prioritize nature in every neighborhood by creating a plan to restore habitats citywide.
- **Revitalize waterfronts:** Convert outdated waterfront infrastructure, like peaker plants, into new green areas with battery storage and native plant nurseries.

Idea #22

Make it easier to decarbonize our homes

New York City's aging housing stock is a major source of carbon emissions. The next mayor must streamline retrofitting projects for all buildings, including those not mandated by Local Law 97, to reduce costs and logistical barriers – all while preventing resident displacement.

- **Enforce Local Law 97:** Demand that Local Law 97 is implemented on schedule while also providing greater case management and support for building owners.
- **Empower a retrofit agency:** Establish a dedicated unit to coordinate across all relevant agencies, simplify permitting, and provide expanded hands-on assistance to small landlords and co-ops during building energy upgrades.
- **Upgrade while preserving affordability:** Offer low-interest and forgivable loans for energy upgrades in exchange for affordability commitments from landlords.
- **Harness government's purchasing power:** Makes green solutions more possible through government's purchasing power, modeling programs like Clean Heat for All to develop affordable, mass-produced heat pumps and other clean energy solutions.

- **Collect energy data:** Start collecting energy data on buildings less than 25,000 sf, standardize collection to help ensure accountability and targeted programs, and expand policies that enforce greater energy benchmarking of buildings of all sizes.
- **Offset retrofit costs:** Advocate for state utility rebates or offsets during installation periods to help property owners meet the threshold of energy investments.

Idea #23

Build out the grid to electrify the city

While New York City moves towards cleaner energy, our old power grid can't keep up with demand. The next mayor must expand opportunities for renewable energy infrastructure in every neighborhood that works reliably during extreme weather and lowers bills for low-income New Yorkers.

- **Shut down peaker plants:** Advocate for full implementation of the Peaker Rule to shut down and replace waterfront peaker plants with clean energy storage and generation.
- **Harness public buildings:** Deepen investments in solar and geothermal energy on public land, like schools, to create clean power and reduce strain on the grid.
- **Create resilient power hubs:** Invest in neighborhood-based programs that provide education and technical support to create backup power during power outages with solar, energy storage, and co-generational technologies.
- **Cut red tape for battery storage:** Reduce financial and bureaucratic barriers to make it easier to build battery storage projects that store clean energy and increase grid reliability.

Idea #24

Educate New Yorkers on how they can confront the climate crisis

Many neighborhoods lack the human infrastructure to adapt their neighborhoods to climate hazards and reduce carbon emissions. By strengthening community spaces and expanding public education, the next mayor can ensure every neighborhood has the tools to respond to climate threats.

- **Fund neighborhood "One-Stop Shops":** In partnership with community organizations, establish neighborhood hubs that provide case management support for complex retrofit projects, offering services like financing assistance and connections to reliable contractors.
- **Activate public spaces for outdoor climate education:** Activate public spaces on weekends through the Open Streets program and plazas to organize outdoor climate workshops on composting or heat pump technology.
- **Create community resilience hubs:** Create physical hubs in every in every neighborhood – at libraries, community and faith-based organizations, schools, museums and other cultural organizations – to provide emergency relief during climate emergencies and space to support ongoing education programming, stewardship and long-term community planning efforts.
- **Expand green job trainings and apprenticeships:** Drawing on programs such as NYC Trash Academy, expand access to training and apprenticeship programs in energy retrofits, sustainable construction, and waste innovation through partnerships with community-based organizations to lead projects in their neighborhoods.

Idea #25

Create a waste-free future

Food waste makes up a significant share of the city's waste stream, while construction and demolition debris account for the majority. The next mayor can divert waste from landfills and create a circular economy by investing in new neighborhood infrastructure and green jobs focused on material reuse and composting.

- **Slash the waste stream:** The Department of Sanitation's job doesn't have to be just picking up trash – it can prevent it through expanded waste reduction programs, infrastructure, and public education.

- **Bring back community composting:** Restore investments for neighborhood composting programs that support green jobs in low-income neighborhoods.
- **Expand special waste collection:** Establish permanent, containerized drop-off sites for textiles, e-waste, and bulky items in partnership with community centers and houses of worship.
- **Incentivize building reuse over demolition:** Introduce policies requiring a minimum percentage of salvaged materials in demolition projects and make adaptive reuse the default approach to redevelopment.
- **Promote material reuse in construction:** Work with NYC Economic Development Corporation (EDC) and the Department of Small Business Services (SBS) to develop a marketplace for salvaged building materials, using procurement incentives, digital tracking systems, and offering space for storage.

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