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April 20, 2023

Chair Dan Garodnick
City Planning Commission
120 Broadway
New York, NY 10271

Re: City of Yes for Carbon Neutrality

Dear Chair Garodnick,

We are writing to express our support for Mayor Eric Adams' proposed city text amendment, City of Yes for Carbon Neutrality (CoYCN). Given the threat that climate change and sea level rise pose to our city, it is crucial that the administration – and the city as a whole – are acting today to reduce or eliminate carbon emissions from buildings and vehicles. There is no more time to wait.

Founded in 1988, [WE ACT for Environmental Justice](http://www.weact.org) is a community-based organization in Harlem, New York City. At the city, state and federal levels WE ACT has been fighting environmental racism -- racial discrimination in environmental policy-making, enforcement of regulations and laws, and targeting communities of color for toxic waste disposal and siting of polluting industries. We recognize and fight to remedy the negative cumulative impacts of unjust policies that have plagued communities of color for decades. Environmental justice is the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all persons regardless of race, color, national origin, or income with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, policies, and activities and the distribution of environmental benefits.

Communities of color are disproportionately burdened by air pollution from carbon emitting sources. They are also more susceptible to the consequences of climate change - including more deadly heatwaves, storm surges, floods, crop failure and energy burden. For these reasons, we support City Planning's entire zoning proposal, and we hope that it is not watered down during the public review process. The zoning text amendments set forth are reasonable and help remove barriers that delay decarbonization efforts. We want to highlight three key aspects that are especially crucial to WE ACT:



Green Retrofits. COYCN would allow buildings to be retrofitted with exterior, insulating panels, which is crucial for preserving affordable and public housing – we support this vociferously.

- Nearly 70% of carbon emissions come from buildings, making them the largest contributor to climate change in NYC. When it comes to older affordable and public housing stock, improving building insulation is a key task. Adding insulation inside a building often reduces the size of apartments and also leaves many gaps in the façade for heat to leak out. Putting exterior cladding on buildings improves their insulation, but arcane zoning definitions, like what is exactly considered “floor area,” often stymie these efforts. This needs to be changed to preserve our city’s affordable and public housing stock. We recognize there is a tremendous cost associated with this, but also that there are city and state and federal support, either in place or coming. We encourage the city to push for more funding.

Heat Pumps on Roofs and in Yards. COYCN would expand the ability of building owners to place HVAC equipment, like heat pumps, on roofs and in yard – this is vital for reducing our carbon footprint.

- “Permitted obstructions” are one of the most obscure part of the Zoning Resolution, but what is and isn’t allowed on roofs and in yards is a huge problem. To electrify buildings, that is, to take them off gas or fuel oil and convert them to heat pumps or other green HVAC systems, you need to have equipment on roofs and in yards. Often there is a very tight allowance for what can go where, meaning that it may be impossible for a building owner to actually convert to heat pumps.

Elevated Solar Trellises. COYCN would allow elevated solar trellises over 100% of roof area, a change which we support wholeheartedly and have called for publicly.

- Allowing elevated solar trellises over 100% of roof coverage could increase potential solar energy generation by 290%. As electric buildings and electric cars increase the demands on the grid, it is more important than ever to be able to generate clean power locally. We are also convinced this rule change would have very



little impact on the way pedestrians experience our city at street level.

Decarbonize Our Waste Streams. COYCN would expand infrastructure, including permeable paving and high-performance tree pits, to help manage stormwater runoff and other contributors to the city's waste stream, which accounts for 4% of its greenhouse gas emissions.

- Despite its role in reducing waste and its associated emissions, the word "composting" does not appear in today's Zoning Resolution. This proposal would rectify that, clarifying that small-scale, neighborhood-focused composting is allowed in commercial storefronts. It would also permit rooftop greenhouses atop non-residential buildings as-of-right, another way we can create a cleaner, greener city for all.

WE ACT looks forward to reviewing the details of the proposal once it enters public review and will offer feedback if necessary to strengthen its effectiveness. Given that climate change is an existential threat to our city, we hope that the Community Boards, Borough Boards, Board Presidents, Planning Commission, and City Council support these amendments and do not weaken its provisions.

Sincerely,

Peggy M. Shepard

Executive Director

WE ACT for Environmental Justice

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