

Adams Administration Announces Three New Initiatives to Spur Office-to-Residential Conversions

On August 17, 2023, Mayor Eric Adams and Chair of the New York City Planning Commission Dan Garodnick announced three initiatives to assist in creating much-needed housing. The proposals focus on easing the process for office-to-residential conversions throughout New York City and creating opportunities for new housing development in Midtown South's manufacturing districts.

"Today, as part of our 'City of Yes for Housing Opportunity' plan, we are throwing open the door to more housing — with a proposal that will allow us to create as many as 20,000 new homes where the building owner wants to convert offices into housing but needs help cutting through the red tape," Mayor Adams stated in a [press release](#). "With these three initiatives — converting empty offices to homes, an Office Conversion Accelerator, and the Midtown South Mixed-Use Neighborhood Plan — we continue to use every tool at our disposal to increase the supply of homes for New Yorkers."

Office to Residential Conversions

In June 2022, the Mayor announced his City of Yes for Housing Opportunity proposal, a citywide zoning text amendment application expected to enter public review in early 2024. In furtherance of the goals for the City of Yes and as a response to legislation sponsored by City Council Member Justin Brannan, the Mayor convened the Office Adaptive Reuse Task Force in July 2022 to explore ways to convert outdated and under-used office stock to other uses, with a focus on housing. In January 2023, the task force released its [Office Adaptive Reuse Study](#), which recommended reforming the regulations controlling office-to-residential conversions and expanding the applicability of flexible conversion regulations.

The City of Yes for Housing Opportunity proposal will now incorporate the task force's recommendation to expand the applicability of existing zoning regulations that provide flexibility for converting older office buildings to residential use. These regulations currently apply only to buildings constructed prior to either 1961 or 1977 in limited areas of New York City and relax certain zoning requirements, including, in some instances, the amount of floor area that can be converted to residential use.

The text amendment application will propose extending the applicability of these relaxed standards to non-residential buildings constructed before 1990 throughout New York City. Still, certain standards, such as those affecting the provision of light and air, could only be adopted by the city with an amendment to corresponding state law. The state legislature failed to adopt such amendments during its 2023 session.

"It makes no sense to allow office buildings to sit empty while New Yorkers struggle to find housing," said Maria Torres-Springer, Deputy Mayor for Housing, Economic Development, and Workforce. "By enabling office conversions, New York will reinvigorate its business districts and deliver new homes near jobs and transit."

Office Conversion Accelerator

The Mayor also announced the [Office Conversion Accelerator](#), which brings together experts from various city agencies to assist building owners with complex conversion projects. The accelerator, which has already launched, is intended to help applicants with aspects of conversion projects, including feasibility assessments and pulling permits.

"I am grateful to have the opportunity to lead the Office Conversion Accelerator, which will help building owners map a path to residential conversions and then facilitate the multiagency



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coordination needed to move through the regulatory processes,” said Rob Holbrook, Executive Director of “Get Stuff Built.”

While the Mayor’s Get Stuff Built plan, announced in late 2022, did not contain a specific initiative related to office conversions, the Office Conversion Accelerator aims to further the plan’s overall goal of breaking down silos between city agencies to speed up the review of applications at the Department of Buildings.

Midtown South Mixed-Use Neighborhood Plan

In addition to its citywide initiatives, the administration is launching the Midtown South Mixed-Use Neighborhood Plan, which will study opportunities to transform four manufacturing districts located between 23rd Street and 40th Street from Fifth Avenue to Eighth Avenue into mixed-use neighborhoods.

The plan will assess zoning and non-zoning initiatives to bring new housing, including affordable housing, to these areas for the first time in more than 50 years while preserving economic opportunities and supporting local businesses. Public engagement on the plan is expected to begin this fall.

“New York City needs short- and long-term solutions to address our housing crisis, and office-to-residential conversion is a critical element that can begin to make a difference soon,” said Jeffrey LeFrancois, Chair of Manhattan Community Board 4, which includes a portion of the study area. “Manhattan Community Board 4 commends the Adams administration for leading on this issue and looks forward to being a part of a robust community engagement process to craft a holistic vision for new housing, jobs, and more in the Midtown South Mixed-Use Neighborhood Plan.”

We will continue to follow the City of Yes for Housing Opportunity text amendment and Midtown South Mixed-Use Neighborhood Plan through their development and public review. We welcome any requests for further information.
