

New York's Zoning Resolution: High Time for a New Look

Change is difficult
but necessary
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Tribeca Abbey (121 Reade Street), designed by The Stephen B. Jacobs Group in 1997, is an example of contextual zoning

New York's present Zoning Resolution is overcomplicated and confusing. It has outmoded remnants, limits design flexibility, and does not encourage sustainability. It should be updated. Change is hard, however, given environmental review and the many constituent groups in the city with sharply different objectives. Still, the city needs to rewrite the Resolution, making an effort to develop a consensus of the different stakeholders' objectives.

The AIA New York Chapter's Zoning Task Force had taken a modest first step to deal with some of these problematic issues. We had brought to public review changes to the Resolution with the following objectives:

- Deal with a largely built-up, mature city where development sites tend to be infill and are often irregularly shaped.
- Allow flexibility to encourage variety and design excellence consistent with sound planning and urban design principles.

- Encourage/permit sustainable design.

As this article goes to press, AIANY has decided to provisionally withdraw these proposals to allow for greater public review and participation. (See www.aiany.org/committees/PlanningUrbanDesign/zoning for more information.)

The NYC Planning Commission needs to find a way to achieve these objectives in a more comprehensive process, along with all the other initiatives the understaffed Department of City Planning is undertaking. Moreover, it should consider the following two additional goals, hopefully not mutually exclusive:

- Find areas of the city that could be up-zoned to increase a full build-out above the currently permitted 10 million people by Floor Area Ratio calculations to allow for the projected population growth.
- Protect the character of existing neighborhoods.