



504 DEMOCRATIC CLUB

The First Democratic Club in the Country Focusing on Disability Rights



Testimony Concerning Zoning for Accessibility

I am the President of the 504 Democratic Club, one of only three city-wide clubs and the Nation's first and largest advocating for the civil rights of people with disabilities. I previously testified before the City Council in 2017 in favor of a project incorporating the same concept as Zoning For Accessibility (ZFA). In that case a developer covered all the expenses for constructing two new Subway elevators at the New York Stock Exchange and was awarded with an FAR bonus. It is interesting to know the developer in that case did not raise the height of his building. It is important to note that the same developer approached us again a year or two later when he wanted to install elevators on the F line for a bonus at his Two Bridges development which we did not support. So our support for this concept is not automatic nor universal.

I want to express our delight that the concept has been incorporated in a much more far-reaching manner than we had hoped. For years, we have been promoting more usage of this concept and realize there have been some missed opportunities but it would appear now we're on track to achieve far greater accessibility than we might have imagined before the introduction of ZFA.

I will leave it to others to discuss the MTA having fallen short of the pledged 100 key stations. And I fully recognize the very dire fiscal constraints under which the MTA is operating due to the pandemic and other factors.

So we strongly support ZFA but I would be remiss if we did not point out what we considered to be weaknesses in the proposal.

Our chief concerns lie in the sections that address the possibility of these bonuses being awarded for environmental or beautification purposes as well as 'walkability'. We do not mean to totally rule out these possibilities but the consensus we're hearing is that accessibility must be prioritized. So we would find improvements other than true accessibility to be acceptable only if the savings realized by the MTA because of these developer improvements go into a 'locked box' for creating elevators elsewhere in the system.

We are also troubled by the application of this zoning being limited to high density areas and Central Business Districts. These areas of the city are largely the domain of the wealthy and the influential. The disability community is the largest minority and the poorest minority and many members of the community, due to employment discrimination, live in outlying low-income areas. Employment is the only sure path out of poverty and if we are to improve employability for the disabled, we must ensure we're doing everything we can to help us get to and from work as easily as the non-disabled workforce or we will remain poor. So the proposal should be expanded to some of the transportation deserts in the far reaches of the Subway system. To maintain that this zoning be limited to high density areas is actually discriminatory in that it does not adequately present a real solution to our underlying transportation crisis.

In summation, we strongly support ZFA and join with many others calling for improvements as outlined above.

THE COUNCIL THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. LU0838-2021 Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: SEPT 10, 2021

(PLEASE PRINT)

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I represent: 504 DEMOCRATIC CLUB

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▶ Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms ◀

Michael Schweinsburg