

**Testimony in Support of the Midtown South Mixed-Use Plan**  
**Presented by Helen Hwang, Chair, ULI New York District Council**

Thank you. My name is Helen Hwang, and I serve as Chair of the Urban Land Institute's New York District Council.

ULI is the oldest and largest network of cross-sector real estate and land use professionals in the world, uniting more than 45,000 members globally across the private, public, and nonprofit sectors. Our membership includes architects, planners, public officials, developers, investors, and academics. Our mission is to shape the future of the built environment for transformative impact in communities worldwide. We care deeply for how the built environment interacts with and enhances urban communities.

In New York, ULI's nearly 3,000 members advance this mission through more than 20 local councils, committees, and hundreds of events focused on housing, sustainability, investments, and infrastructure. Our members volunteer their expertise through technical assistance programs and public official workshops that demystify the land use process and offer constructive, apolitical guidance on complex urban challenges. For example, last summer, six ULI members worked with Montefiore Einstein to reimagine Morris Park as a transit-connected campus.

At the heart of our work are three global priorities: increasing housing attainability, decarbonization, and developing a diverse new generation of real estate leaders. Our efforts also recognize the need to rethink how underutilized urban areas are revitalized. While creating more housing is integral to our efforts, we strive for a holistic approach to building complete, mixed-use, inclusive communities that reflect how people live, work, and move today.

New York City is at a turning point. The population is growing again, with the U.S. Census Bureau reporting 8.48 million residents as of July 2024. The demand to live, work, shop and invest in New York remains strong. That demand also brings urgency to adapt our land use tools so every district can evolve into a complete neighborhood—one that brings people together through shared experiences, opportunity, and a sense of belonging, supported by housing, jobs, retail goods and services, and community facilities—ensuring our city remains both vibrant and equitable.

The Midtown South Mixed-Use Plan is a transformational initiative that takes a holistic, future-focused approach to re-envisioning one of Manhattan's most iconic, yet undervalued districts. The Plan seeks to evolve Midtown South's zoning to better position the district as a neighborhood that serves the needs of existing and future office tenants, commuters, and manufacturing uses, while also building upon its identity to better serve New Yorkers who desire to live in an activated place that is alive throughout the day and night—a dynamic 24-hour

ecosystem of residences, workplaces, local businesses, and civic anchors where everyday life unfolds on lively, walkable streets.

We envision a place that connects people—to opportunity, to culture, and to each other—through a thriving mix of businesses, food, arts, and everyday services that invite residents, commuters, and neighbors to linger and feel at home. This plan recognizes, as we do, that building community is about more than buildings. It is about enhancing quality of life—“stitching” the district into the daily life of the city so it serves not just those passing through, but those who call this place home.

The plan builds on Midtown South’s unique legacy, particularly the Garment District’s historic role in fashion, manufacturing, and creative production. It supports the evolution of the area as a 21st-century hub for living, innovation, and culture. It encourages the adaptive reuse of aging commercial buildings, enables office-to-residential conversions, and allows for greater residential density, including affordable housing through the Mandatory Inclusionary Housing program. The inclusion of MIH is especially significant, as it ensures that new residential development will deliver long-term, sustainable affordability in one of the most infrastructure-rich and opportunity-dense areas of the city. Providing the opportunity for more diverse and inclusive affordable housing creation is a critical need across the entirety of New York City and its inclusion should be lauded in the Midtown South Mixed-Use Plan.

Just as important, the plan recognizes that a vibrant neighborhood is not built on housing alone. By supporting zoning for modern light manufacturing and smaller-scale creative production, the plan helps fuel a diversified and nimble economy. This includes not just finance and technology, but also fashion, arts, design, and food—industries that reflect the soul of New York, industries that have been the lifeblood of this neighborhood for years. These vital industries deserve modern spaces and zoning that encourages them to thrive.

The plan also sets the stage for a true 24/7 neighborhood. It creates opportunities for new schools, libraries, and other critical civic infrastructure, which are the building blocks of a complete community. It reimagines Midtown South not as a district of silos but as a walkable, multi-dimensional place where people can live near where they work, where children go to school, where artists create, and where the streets are active and safe during and beyond business hours. In doing so, it “sews” Midtown South more fully into the daily life of the city, creating a place that serves not just those who pass through, but those who proudly call this community home.

New York City stands at a turning point, and Midtown South—served by nearly every subway line, Penn Station, and the Port Authority—offers an unparalleled canvas for inclusive growth to support and grow the existing thousands of jobs. This plan turns underused blocks into a living, breathing mixed-use neighborhood, leveraging transit, talent, and legacy to create an ecosystem

where residents can live near work, where entrepreneurs can launch ideas, and where culture is an everyday experience. Of the five boroughs, what better place to support this level of enhanced density?

In a post-pandemic era where office demand has shifted, and New York must make every square foot count, the Midtown South Mixed-Use Plan is a bold and necessary step. It significantly improves upon decades of outdated zoning policies that have limited the district's potential and creates space for housing, jobs, essential retail and civic life, all without displacing the neighborhood's distinctive architectural, cultural, and creative identity. Through thoughtful rezoning and flexible land use, the plan strikes a careful balance between preservation and progress.

This Midtown South Mixed-Use Plan is more than a rezoning: It is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to reimagine what Midtown South should be, not only as a business district but as a dynamic, inclusive community that embodies the best of New York: diversity, culture, density, opportunity, and a daily rhythm animated by people, commerce, and community.

ULI New York commends the Department of City Planning for its vision and leadership in advancing this proposal. The Midtown South Mixed-Use Plan captures the magic of neighborhood-making—housing that welcomes everyone, ground-floors alive with local commerce, shared spaces that foster belonging, and design that honors history while embracing possibility. The plan could set a national precedent for how zoning reform can ignite the types of vibrant, inclusive, and resilient urban districts that reflect the mission and values of ULI and its members. Thank you for your dedication and continued commitment to a better New York City.