MAS NYC PRESENTS

IDEAS FOR NEW YORK’S NEW LEADERSHIP

The Municipal Art Society of New York
MAS NYC
About MAS

For 120 years the Municipal Art Society has made New York a more livable city by advocating for excellence in urban planning and design, a commitment to historic preservation and the arts, and the empowerment of local communities to effect change in their neighborhoods. From saving Grand Central Terminal and the lights of Times Square, to establishing groundbreaking land-use and preservation laws that have become national models, MAS has been at the forefront of New York’s most important campaigns to promote our city’s economic vitality, cultural vibrancy, environmental sustainability, and social diversity.

For more information, visit mas.org.
About the Project:

Ideas for New York’s New Leadership draws on the diversity of interests and expertise that shape the city: planners, designers, artists, elected officials, academics, entrepreneurs, corporate business and community activists. To enrich the discussion about the next set of policy ideas for New York City, The Municipal Art Society (MAS) invited a cross-section of New Yorkers with knowledge in various urban policy areas to offer their guidance to the new leadership. Each contributor discusses a key issue, opportunity or priority for action within a specific domain. The ideas that follow do not necessarily reflect the views of MAS, but are presented to stimulate a diverse and inclusive discourse to inform decision making and priority setting.

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BUILDING A MORE RESILIENT CITY

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Many Birds with One Stone: Adaptation and Economic Development

Scaling Up Energy in Low-Income Housing

All Hands on Deck: Building a Resilience Constituency
NYC has the opportunity to meet its most serious challenges in terms of affordable housing, workforce diversification, educational attainment, infrastructure deterioration, and environmental risk by advancing measures and capacities framed by a comprehensive adaptation strategy. The caveat is that strategies are only as good as they can be acted upon and operationalized. This essay argues that East River corridor is ripe for the application of policies and investments which have the potential to positively impact a broader city-wide constituency. However, the most immediate impediment to the challenges we face is one of language.

Adaptation is not simply a responsive strategy to climate change. It is a framework for proactively addressing a series of accelerated challenges in the human, built, and natural environments which have little to no historical precedent in their degree or pace of relevancy. From aging society and transitional labor economies to the increased risk of heat waves and storm surge, adaptation is about managing change not as a means of preventing system failure or preserving the status quo but as a progressive stimulus for advancing institutional governance in both the public and private sectors.

The lack of consistent heuristics in the language of mitigation, coping, resilience, and adaptation is holding back the development of comprehensive public sector...
regulations and timely private sector investment decisions. Each word varies tremendously in its psychosocial orientation, time horizon, and ontological disposition. So what is the correct word? Adaptation. Adaptation denotes both a responsive action and a capacity to act in the face of external change which challenges the status quo. But, what makes adaptation different from the competing language is that it belies a progressive state wherein the future state of being is advanced—for the better—beyond its predicate state.

Mitigation holds perhaps the clearest conceptual distinction in that it speaks to the prevention of the occurrence of the external stimuli of change. However, mitigation is increasingly loosing relevancy as an exclusive matter of focus in that there is little doubt as to the probabilistic occurrence of climate change. In contrast, coping is a short-term responsive mechanism for the preservation of the minimum functions of an existing system or state of being. While the provision of emergency shelter and post-disaster psychological and financial counseling are laudable actions, coping can very often be grounded in an emotional response with its own rationality that—like mitigation—often conflicts with the long-term logics of adaptation.

In related terms, resiliency is about responding to external stimuli to maintain the status quo of existing internal operations. While the status quo is often misapplied to notions of community, all communities are in a constant state of change in the face of larger demographic and economic changes—changes which are only accelerated by climate change. The question in political terms is how one guides and leads change as a matter of social equity and fiscal stewardship. A truly successful adaptation strategy is one that mainstreams each of these concepts (mitigation, coping, and resiliency) into a comprehensive action plan that weights and prioritizes risks and needs of existing and future populations.

There is an argument to be made—in the efficiencies of density and proximity—that the future population of NYC should be accommodated along the East River corridor. The East River is historically oriented in

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### Bridging Waterfront and Economic Development

**Present:**

- Stressed Low-Risc Housing
- Vacant Manufacturing
- Eroding Shoreline

**Future:**

- Mid-Scale Housing
- Hybrid Post-Industrial
- Multi-Purpose Levee

- Self-Financed Affordable Housing
- Build Back Transit Gateway
- Flood Gate
- Pumping Station & Piping

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plan incidental to the commerce of the sea. However, the future of the corridor is best conceptualized in section. From the disintegrated waterfront to the post-industrial landscape, there is an opportunity to create and leverage value which serves to finance the underlying infrastructure itself. In this regard, infrastructure should be conceptualized to include not only the physical conventions as we know it but also affordable housing, which serves an equally compelling public utility. Out of necessity, private investment should be accommodated to guarantee housing production that matches the income diversity of NYC’s ever evolving households. By focusing on the fundamental economics of value creation through waterfront investments, the city has the opportunity to utilize physical development for the advancement of human development.

More fundamentally, human development is about education and jobs. Moving inland, the post-industrial building stock provides the dual function of preserving historic notions of memory, as well as a low-cost alternative to the high-cost barrier of accommodating the space needs of entrepreneurs and educators. The domestication of global best practices tells us that linking everything on the education continuum from technical education to post-doc research with emerging industries is a win-win for economic development. Students get access to training and experience, and companies get access to a diverse and innovative labor force. These hybridized zones from Sunset Park to Long Island City represent a new paradigm in the advancement of commerce and community. In this sense, NYC has an opportunity to adapt not only to climate change but to shifting labor economies.

By consistently formalizing the language and progressive intent of adaptation, the city has the opportunity to develop policies which enable the public and private sectors to respond to a variety of interrelated challenges. This enabling function is critical for the advancement of adaptation related investments which have the opportunity to recapitalize the manufacturing, education and technology sectors. While the returns on investment for public and private sectors vary significantly, the need for focused leadership is one that unites all parties. By advancing strategic adaptation measures and capacities that focus on value creation and entrepreneurial advancement, the Mayor of NYC has the opportunity to hit many birds with one stone.
Voice for the future of our city.