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Testimony
of Jerilyn Perine, Executive Director at
Citizens Housing & Planning Council, for the
City Planning Commission
on the Zoning for Quality and Affordability text amendment

December 16, 2015

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My name is Jerilyn Perine and I am the Executive Director of the Citizens Housing & Planning Council, the oldest civic and educational organization that focuses on concerns of the City's housing stock. Prior to this position I served in NYC government for 28 years – including as the Commissioner of the Department of Housing Preservation and Development between 2000 and 2004.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of ZQA on behalf of CHPC.

My colleague Sarah Watson will be speaking about our study of the Building Envelope rules and the need for reform.

You will also hear the testimony of our Board President Mark Ginsberg which will address some of the more critical technical and design issues that the new text seeks to address.

I want to talk about just one thing.

Whether we *plan* for it or not our population is growing.

Whether we *like* it or not our population is growing and will likely hit 9 million people by 2040.

As crime remains low, as our city's cultural and social life become more vibrant and diverse, as our economy remains strong, we will continue to attract those with aspirations and ambitions from all over the world and across all incomes.

And we are retaining more of our own population – NY'ers born here – from the young to the elderly – and for all the same reasons.

Of course this growth has impacted our historically tight housing market. The result? Those with the financial means – have housing choices in NYC never before imagined – from old tenements in neighborhoods now sporting exuberant street life – to newly constructed high rises in areas once off limits as old industrial areas.

But for those with less income the choices are virtually non existent– they are losing out more and more in the competition for our City’s scarcest commodity – a vacant affordable apartment.

So now nearly a quarter of our households share their apartment with either extended family members or unrelated single adults in order to put a roof over their heads. More than a quarter million people live in illegal spaces that are often unsafe and nearly always lacking legal tenant protections; nearly 60,000 of our fellow New Yorkers are living in homeless shelters and thousands more are on the streets.

At the same time our construction costs are higher than anywhere in the U.S. Even worse the cost of housing is outpacing the cost of construction as transaction and regulatory burdens further squeeze supply and push prices up.

The Mayor has smartly created a housing strategy to both use the City’s financial resources to directly subsidize housing – both new and existing – to reach below market households and has looked for ways to improve housing regulations to help reduce the cost of development and increase the supply of affordable housing.

ZQA is an important part of that strategy with a bundle of changes that will update rules from 1987 so that the already permitted FAR can yield the amount of housing that was intended.

It will encourage affordable housing for the elderly and families earning 80% of median or less; it will reduce in some cases parking requirements that increase costs and decrease affordable housing; it will allow for more efficient construction techniques like modular construction; and by allowing flexibility in the building envelope it will be possible to improve the interior design of apartments and the exterior designs of buildings.

Or we could do nothing new and stand by as the number of New Yorkers who are severely rent burdened or overcrowded continues unabated – and as our City becomes essentially unattainable to all but the wealthy or simply those lucky enough to have gotten here first.