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AIA New York Statement of Support for SoHo/NoHo Rezoning

Equitable design is a key component of solving New York City's ongoing affordability crisis. Without new housing, rents and home prices will continue to rise, making the city unaffordable for most New Yorkers. While there has been a significant amount of new residential construction in the city over the last few years, it has primarily been in more economically distressed and non-white communities in the outer boroughs. It is time that wealthier white neighborhoods start to accept new residences and new residents.

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Architects strive to design integrated neighborhoods, ones with residents from diverse backgrounds and economic circumstances. True integration requires a diversity of housing typologies, not only market-rate units, but affordable and supportive units as well. The city has many tools to encourage diverse typologies, including the NYC 15/15 Rental Assistance Program, Supportive Housing Loan Program, Mandatory Inclusionary Housing (MIH), and Zoning for Quality and Affordability (ZQA). All of these should be utilized for rezoning SoHo, NoHo, and other neighborhoods.

The proposed rezoning of SoHo and NoHo offers a first step towards making our city's housing policies more equitable. The current proposal shows that new construction can occur within established neighborhoods and historic districts, respecting older forms of architecture and current residents. Most crucially, plans for 800 units of legally mandated affordable housing would make one of our country's most expensive areas affordable for thousands of New Yorkers.

SoHo and NoHo have not undergone significant zoning changes in half a century, despite transforming from industrial to primarily residential and retail in use. Rezoning the area would enable compliance with more recent housing policies, such as MIH, which requires around 25% of new units to be affordable. Furthermore, it would also remove burdensome restrictions on small businesses which do not exist in neighborhoods with more updated zoning.

It is the duty of architects to ensure that neighborhoods are open and accessible to all, not only those of means. Therefore, AIA New York is expressing its strong support for the rezoning of SoHo and NoHo to allow for more residential construction. We encourage the city to allow for even greater amounts of affordable housing as the proposal is refined through discussions with the community. The current debate over this rezoning will set the precedent going forward of whether affordable housing can be designed and built in wealthier white neighborhoods.

It is time that zoning be used to make our city, particularly those centrally located neighborhoods like SoHo and NoHo, livable for all New Yorkers. In 2022, we will have a new Mayor and City Council, and we hope a rezoning of SoHo and NoHo will spur them to allow more affordable housing in similar parts of the city.

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