

**TESTIMONY OF ADRIEN A. WEIBGEN BEFORE THE
NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL COMMITTEE ON HOUSING AND BUILDINGS
REGARDING THE HOUSING NOT WAREHOUSING ACT
(INT. 1034-2015, 1036-2015, 1039-2015)**

Thursday, September 15, 2016

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Adrien Weibgen, and I am a Staff Attorney at the Community Development Project of the Urban Justice Center, or "CDP." CDP's mission is to strengthen the impact of grassroots organizations in New York City's low-income and other excluded communities. We partner with community organizations to win legal cases, publish community-driven research reports, assist with the formation of new organizations and cooperatives, and provide technical and transactional assistance in support of their work towards social justice. As part of its work around neighborhood change, CDP is a member of the New York City Community Land Initiative, an alliance of social justice and affordable housing advocates committed to addressing the root causes of homelessness and displacement.

We are excited to support the package of bills collectively known as Housing Not Warehousing, and I will focus my testimony today on Intro 1039, which would both compile a list of all publicly-owned vacant property that might be suitable for the development of affordable housing, and recommend paths toward developing these units for affordable housing where possible. This bill is a critical first step toward citywide practices that encourage the consistent, responsible use of public land and buildings for permanently and deeply affordable housing and other community benefits.

As this Committee knows well, publicly-owned land and buildings are a vital piece of the City's strategy to create affordable housing, and land has a value that is hard to overstate. As a client of mine often says, "Land is one of the only things God isn't making more of any time soon." With land costs at zero, it becomes financially possible for the City to create deeply affordable housing for the people who need it most. Using public land for that purpose is especially critical in light of the failure of both the Mandatory Inclusionary Housing policy and the City's current subsidized housing options to reach the income levels in greatest need.

Unfortunately, today, the City lacks a big vision for its public land and buildings. Too often, these assets have been allowed to sit empty for years while people struggle to find and afford decent housing. In other cases, valuable public sites are squandered for uses other than deeply affordable housing when housing is what is needed most. For example, the proposed rezoning of Staten Island's North Shore calls for the disposition of several City-owned sites, two of which are currently slated for development as office space. A third public site is slated for mixed-use development with some housing, but less than a third of that housing will be affordable. This shouldn't happen. But today, it is impossible for community members and their elected officials to have informed discussions about what to do with the assets available in their communities, because it is hard to know what is there, and what has the potential to be developed

as deeply affordable housing. Too often, community members are able to start a conversation about using public assets for affordable housing only after different plans have been made.

Ultimately, CDP hopes that the City will move toward models that ensure that all housing build on public land is deeply and permanently affordable. The first step is making sure that we have a solid understanding of what land is available for these purposes, and we believe that these bills will give Council Members and City agencies the information they need to start leveraging more public sites to create housing for extremely low income households – the people who need it most.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. If you have any questions about my testimony, I can be reached at aweibgen@urbanjustice.org or 646-459-3027.