



Testimony before the New York City Planning Commission

On the Proposed Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) Related to
the proposed Zoning for Quality and Affordability Initiative

LeadingAge New York

December 16, 2015

Long term care in New York is being transformed. Today's elders want to live independently as long as possible and remain active participants in their communities. At the same time, policy-makers are advancing new models of care that incentivize better health outcomes and higher quality at a lower overall cost. Nursing homes, assisted living facilities, retirement communities and independent senior housing are being reinvented to meet the needs and preferences of a rising number of aging New Yorkers, and to reflect new ways of delivering and paying for health care and supportive services.

LeadingAge New York members are at the forefront of these changes. Nonprofit providers of homes and services for elders, as well as managed long term care plans, are rethinking the way that we provide and pay for elder housing and the services that people need as they age. The proposed changes to the New York City Zoning Resolution that are part of the Zoning for Quality and Affordability (ZQA) initiative are critical to the future of the elder care continuum that serves the growing contingent of aging New Yorkers. We urge you to support the proposed changes.

The current zoning regulations place unnecessary barriers to developing independent senior housing and aging services in ways that meet current needs. The ZQA proposal would change the current square footage ratio, making it easier for senior housing owners to develop appropriately sized units, with the common space necessary to include supportive services that are essential to keeping seniors healthy in their homes.

The ZQA proposes allowing slightly taller buildings, when the ground floor height is increased. This provision will make it easier to include commercial space with attractive storefronts which improve neighborhoods. It also makes it easier to co-locate health related services such as primary care physicians' offices, adult day health care programs, and Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHC) that are so critical, especially in low income communities.

The ZQA proposals change outdated definitions of senior living communities, which will remove barriers to locating similar types of communities on the same property, or campus. This is critical as providers must make the most efficient use possible of valuable land for new construction of housing.

Perhaps most importantly, the proposed amendments change requirements for parking in senior living communities. A recent study by one of our partner organizations identifies 39 underutilized parking lots adjacent to existing senior housing buildings. If fully developed, these empty spaces could accommodate more than 2,000 new units of senior housing. With waiting lists for senior apartments reaching the thousands in many neighborhoods, this change is essential to meet existing and growing need for affordable senior housing.

The elder care continuum is adapting to changes in the way that long term care is provided and paid for in New York State. The proposed changes that are part of the ZQA will help these nonprofit providers to better fulfill their shared mission of helping New York's elders to age in good health, while maximizing their independence and engagement with their communities. We urge your support of the changes.

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