

# Transcript: Mayor Eric Adams Outlines Vision for "City of Yes," Plan for Citywide Zoning Initiatives to Support Small Businesses, Create new Housing, Promote Sustainability

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**Mayor Eric Adams:** There's a good story about this smile and optimism. And where I got it from is 22 years of watching mankind do some of the most horrific things in the city. And you would go to the average police officer at a terrible scene, a terrible place where violence took place. And the therapy was really to just figure out a way, just how do you have an optimistic view. Imagine every day, going somewhere where you see a terrible encounter. My years of policing, no one called me to come to a birthday party. You called me when the party was shot up. No one called me when a baby was born. You called me when there was a domestic violent incident. And if you allow that to define you, those worse moments, then you would go home broken, unsure.

**Mayor Adams:** You just had to find a way just to find optimism. You had to find a way to just smile, no matter what you were going through. But at the same time, public safety was a serious job. You had to make sure you did your job during those difficult mid-eighties, early nineties, when we were living in a different city. So don't get it twisted. Don't get it mixed up. I'm going to smile. I'm going to enjoy our city's nightlife and economy. I'm going to make sure that we do the right things and you're going to see this optimistic energy, but this is a hard damn job. And not everybody can do it. Not everyone has this stomach to take this dysfunctional city in the right direction. I'm the right person to be the mayor of this city right now. I'm the right person to be the mayor.

**Mayor Adams:** And so, Steven, I thank you. I thank you for being a friend of the city. And as Steven mentioned, I gave the keynote, the very last in-person ABNY breakfast before the pandemic hit our city. And I know this is a small crowd today, but it's good

seeing you all. Much has changed since then, and it's good to be back here with all of you after two years.

**Mayor Adams:** I want to thank ABNY for supporting our city, not just for the last two years, but for all the decades leading up to now. 50 years ago, ABNY was formed to help lift New York out of the fiscal crises of the seventies. It was just one of the many times our city was written off by naysayers. But New Yorkers will never give up on our city or each other. Over and over again, the city comes together and reinvents itself. Booming more innovative and more resilient each time as we become stronger and stronger. And it is because of the spirit and commitment in this room – we need you again now. Your experience, your support, and your civic muscle.

**Mayor Adams:** I like to talk about "Getting Stuff Done," but I never lose sight of the fact that it is always a team effort, Team New York. For the first five months of this administration, our administration, it has been going on the offense on our most pressing issues, public safety and economic recovery. Public safety is a prerequisite to prosperity. We're not safe if we don't have a prosperous city. The threat of gun violence dominates the national agenda and remains the number one focus of my administration. This is a crisis we must continue to fight with everything we have, even as we work towards making real change in Washington.

**Mayor Adams:** We've made some progress here in the city, getting over 3,000 illegal guns off the street and lowering overall crime rates. Though more guns will be brought in, the NYPD is actively getting guns out of the hands of potential shooters and doing everything possible to protect their fellow New Yorkers. In addition to combating crime, we've reached out to help those in the greatest need. We released our Subway Safety Plan and have helped over 1,300 New Yorkers. Remember when I first did it, that first week? 22 people took us up on our offer to go into shelters. People said it wasn't possible to get people off our subway system. We've now removed 1,300 of our fellow New Yorkers and they now are having the level of dignity that they deserve.

**Mayor Adams:** And we are doing all we can to support a strong and sustainable economic recovery. We released our Economic Recovery Blueprint to help chart the way, and have already seen over 100,000 jobs return to our city. We're off to a strong start. And today we are going to talk about how to go even further. For far too long, our city has tolerated dysfunction and failed to get out ahead of opportunities to change things. We've used piecemeal approaches to nibble away at large-scale problems.

We've missed opportunities to enact solutions that would transform our city and support innovation and development. But going forward, we are going to do things differently. Our cities are the future. And New York is going to lead the way.

**Mayor Adams:** Today, I want to preview some of our plans to supercharge the economy and improve the economic recovery and lay the foundation for a new era in energy, housing, and commerce. Some of these ideas are long-term visions that will play out over the years to come. Others are practical plans that will produce results on a shorter timeline. But all of them are centered around the same idea: embracing the creativity and innovation of 8.8 million New Yorkers. Cutting red tape. Minimizing bureaucracy. Reimagining the way we do business, build housing, and promote economic growth. We're tired of the artificial barriers and unnecessary regulations that have stifled expansion and innovation.

**Mayor Adams:** Going forward, we are going to turn New York into a city of yes. Yes in my backyard. Yes on my block. Yes in my borough. There are four key actions I want to preview for you today and they will allow us to dramatically transform our city and our economy. First, zoning for economic opportunity, our plan to promote business growth across the board. Second, Zero Carbon Zoning. Our forward-thinking approach to bringing our city into the sustainable future. Third, zoning for housing opportunity. Gary LaBarbera will love that. This will be a key component in our soon-to-be-released Housing Blueprint, along with the biggest investment in affordable housing this city has ever made. Fourth, jumpstarting investments in the next generation of borough centers that can bring good jobs closer to New York, starting in the Bronx. In addition to these specific actions, we are going to be more creative and strategic about the way we invest capital dollars. And we are also determined to speed up government review of private investments in housing and economic development.

**Mayor Adams:** This is a transformative time for our city. And we have the solutions ready to deploy. We will introduce three citywide zoning text amendments that will change New York City's approach to development by removing obstacles and simplifying rules over the next two years. Let's start with one of the keys to accelerating our economic recovery: zoning for economic opportunity. Rules that made sense in the days of the rotary telephone are getting in the way of doing business in the age of the smartphone. We must tackle some of the long-standing dysfunction and contradictions in our zoning and regulation. This includes reforming antiquated rules on where certain businesses can be located, simplifying codes that contribute to keeping storefronts

vacant, speeding up approvals and making smarter capital investments in communities, and lifting regulations that keep businesses from evolving and expanding.

**Mayor Adams:** Imagine your local bakery in a residential neighborhood with lines out the door. The owners are eager to add more capacity and deliver to stores and markets. It would be great if they could expand into the vacant storefront next door. But under current rules, they would have to move their entire operation to a manufacturing district. We're going to change that no to a yes, and let this bakery keep growing their business in a neighborhood they started in. Think about the owner of a tapas bar that has live music on weekends and wants to set aside a small space for dancing, but finds that under city rules, it's not allowed. We're going to change that no to a yes, and let the people dance. Likewise, in many neighborhoods, you can currently open a bike repair shop on one side of the street, but not on the other. We're going to change that no to a yes, and make sure New Yorkers can get their bike fixed and back on the street. Saying yes will improve our streetscape, make doing business easier and boost our economic recovery.

**Mayor Adams:** This brings me to our second major effort: Zero Carbon Zoning. Every New Yorker can see that our energy future is all about renewables. The technology and the resources are already here. Our job is to speed up installation, make it easier to invest and show the globe what a city of the future looks like. This means changing our zoning rules so that we are not hindering the deployment of solar panels, battery storage, and other next generation equipment. It's unimaginable to think about it. Right now, less than 1% of vehicles in our city are electric. And we want that number to increase. That means expanding EV charging rigs and fast-charging stations. Imagine a developer who wants to include a public EV charging station in the base of a building, but is told no by the city because electric vehicles charging is not permitted in some commercial and all residential districts. We're going to change that no to a yes, and make sure New Yorkers who want electric cars have a place to charge them.

**Mayor Adams:** Now imagine a building owner who wants to install solar on their rooftop, but because of a web of city regulations, is limited to using just 25% of the roof area. We're going to change that no to a yes, and make sure we are allowing New Yorkers to have every possible option for sustainable energy. New rules that promote sustainability will support more than 61,000 energy efficiency jobs in our city. The jobs include installing more efficient appliances, improving lighting, insulation and ventilation, as well as renewable heating and cooling. And you know what we're going to do? We're going to build out a pipeline. We're going to go into those communities that have been

historically denied. We're going to give them the skills and training, because if they have a hammer in their hand, they won't have a gun in their hand and they will believe they're part of this city as it grows. You can't build a city and watch the future of our children go down in the process. We will employ New Yorkers as we make our city more sustainable in the process.

**Mayor Adams:** In addition to making our city more sustainable, we must make it more accessible. That brings us to our third major action: expanding our housing stock. There are many factors that contribute to our housing crises, but one of the biggest is a failure to produce enough new housing to keep up with growing demand. The result has been skyrocketing prices that make it harder for many to afford to live in our city. We want New Yorkers to stay here, put down roots and raise families. We want to continue welcoming immigrants and young people seeking opportunity. So we must have places for all kinds of New Yorkers at many different price points. Will soon be releasing a detailed Housing Blueprint. But today I want to focus on one key component of that plan, updating our zoning to boost the overall housing supply in our city. We're looking to change up the rules and allow a wider range of housing types and sizes to accommodate all kinds of households across the city.

**Mayor Adams:** We will look to ease conversions of underutilized buildings, including vacant office space that will allow new housing to be created without building from the ground up. We did it after 9/11, we rebuilt downtown here, we can continue to convert office space in the process. We're going to make it easier for owners of homes in small buildings to alter and update their property, whether it is adding a family room or an apartment. For example, let's think of a family that has lived in their home in Queens for 25, 30 years. They would like to convert their second floor into a rental unit to help them pay their mortgage. Unfortunately, our zoning regulations say that rental units will require an additional parking space and they have nowhere to put one. We're going to change that no to a yes, and help that Queens family stay in their home.

**Mayor Adams:** All throughout New York, there are places we could be developing and building — they're suited for people to live. But city zoning laws put artificial limits on the number of studio apartments per building, so those developments never get built. We are going to change that no to a yes, and help a young person who moved to the greatest city on the globe, an older person stay in the city they grew up in, or a person who has experienced homelessness get permanent housing or supportive living space. The overarching goal: build more housing across the city and change the rules to enable it starting now. That's what we mean when we talk about a city of yes.

**Mayor Adams:** Our fourth major effort is all about neighborhood investment. We will work closely with communities to make investments and targeted land use changes in the next generations of borough centers that can bring good jobs closer to New Yorkers, create housing, and promote sustainability. Today, I'm pleased to announce that the Bronx will be first, and we will be jumpstarting our work with communities and City Council around the future Bronx Metro North stations.

**Mayor Adams:** We have four new Bronx Metro North stations slated to open in 2027. This is a once-in-a-century opportunity to improve transit access to the East Bronx and the entire region. Morris park, the home of one of these future stations is the biggest jobs hub in the Bronx, with thousands of high paying jobs within a half mile of the station, including places like Montefiore, Jacobi Medical Center, and Albert Einstein College of Medicine. MTA work on these stations starts this year, and we intend to work with Council Member Velazquez and Farias, and to reach out to community residents for ideas on improving the entire area around the station. We will continue to work with communities across the five boroughs in the City Council to plan for job opportunities, housing, and infrastructure.

**Mayor Adams:** For example, along Atlantic Avenue in Crown Heights, Brooklyn, there is an area with outdated zoning – and we are already working with Council Members Hudson and Osse and the entire City Council to develop a plan that will benefit a major swath of Brooklyn. We are also thinking differently about the capital budget. We want all of city government working collaboratively to invest in what New Yorkers want most – and in the communities with the greatest need. That's why we created the SEED Fund, to support capital projects that deliver the biggest bang for the buck. These are funds that are important and can be used to expand transit access or childcare, build libraries or repair commercial corridors. And we'll be growing that initial investment in the years ahead.

**Mayor Adams:** We are also going to embark on neighborhood-wide capital investments – not just where zoning has changed, but where we believe the investment will have the greatest impact. We are going to identify areas where we can expand housing and opportunity in every neighborhood and in every borough. We're going to make sure this city rises together. That's what a city of yes is all about.

**Mayor Adams:** And finally, we need to speed up city review of private applicants for new investments in our neighborhoods. We want to accelerate economic development

by reducing administrative burdens. The Building and Land Use Approval Streamlining Taskforce, or BLAST, we call it, will be a key component of this effort. I want to thank the Department of City Planning's Dan Garodnick and Edith Hsu-Chen for their great work on this, and I want to thank the leadership of the dozen city agencies involved.

**Mayor Adams:** We don't expect to completely rework the city's charter-mandated land use process, but we will strive to make it more user-friendly and seamless. Our agencies will learn to be better communicators, actions with private applicants, and understand that it is our job to encourage investment in New York City. That has been missing. Far too many agencies don't understand part of their mandate is to allow the city to grow and flourish. Don't start with no. Start with how do we get to yes. How do we build our city?

**Mayor Adams:** We will not let a proposal to build new housing and create new jobs languish on a desktop or in an inbox. By eliminating unnecessary processes, we are going to deliver speedier reviews on the front end. We will also make improvements in community engagement, especially when it comes to community boards and elected officials. And we will speak with Speaker Adams and Councilmembers Salamanca, Riley, and Powers to further develop these initiatives and incorporate their ideas for how to make the system work better for everyone. We are not going to say NO when we can say YES and get more projects over the goal line for the benefit of our city.

**Mayor Adams:** New Yorkers are going to wait around and see results? Not this city. They're going to wait around while other cities watch us fail? Not this city. This is a city of continuous and strong spirits, and we're going to move towards the future. We will be the pace setters, the early adopters, the City of Yes. The naysaying and dysfunction has already slowed down far too many transformative investments. Everything cannot be a default no. Change is part of the city's DNA. That's why we need to say yes, yes to the future, yes to our communities, yes to new businesses, and yes to new housing.

**Mayor Adams:** Yes is the can do spirit that has powered us through many different eras, each with its own culture, commerce, and character. From the jazz age to the digital revolution. From Harlem to Wall Street to Far Rockaway, this city has reinvented itself time and time again. It's happening again right now. Call it recovery, renewal, or vibe shift, it's undeniable, just like our city is undeniable.

**Mayor Adams:** I can't wait to see the curtain continue to rise on the new New York, the greatest city in the world, the greatest place to be. I know the city, and I say it over and over again. We're not great because of our brick and mortar. We're not great because of our buildings, our subway system. We're not great because of Broadway. We're great because, as Snapple said, we're made up of the best stuff on earth. We're New Yorkers. Thank you for being a New Yorker.

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