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Nuha Ansari  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

April 22, 2025

Richard R. Buery, Jr.  
Chair, NYC Charter Revision Commission  
Delivered via email

#### Re: NYC Mayoral Charter Revision Commission re. Public Oversight in the Land Use Process

Dear Chair Buery,

On behalf of FRIENDS of the Upper East Side Historic Districts, I write to applaud your desire to address the City's housing crisis. A 2023 survey confirming a 1.4% rental vacancy rate is an alarming statistic, and we agree that bold, thoughtful solutions are needed to address affordability and access.

However, these solutions must not come at the expense of the public's role in shaping the city's future. Transparency, accountability, and community participation are essential pillars of a healthy planning process and a responsive city government.

During the Commission's first public hearing in February, former Deputy Mayor Vicki Been emphasized the lengthy and costly nature of approving new housing. Others echoed sentiments that the system makes it too easy to stop housing and too difficult to approve it. There have also been calls to diminish the influence of individual Council Members on land use actions within their districts, and to potentially weaken landmark protections in the name of development. These ideas reflect a growing movement toward limiting both political and public oversight of land use decisions.

While these concerns may stem from legitimate concerns, they risk painting democratic decision-making as a mere obstacle to be overcome. ULURP was created to ensure a predictable and transparent process that included meaningful input from those most affected—residents, community boards, borough presidents, and the City Council. It allows New Yorkers to voice concerns about how new development may affect infrastructure, affordability, neighborhood character, and historic resources.

We are especially troubled by proposals to exempt certain developments from ULURP entirely, or to shift final authority away from the City Council and toward unelected bodies. While well-intentioned, such changes could lead to a less responsive and less equitable system, in which local context and community needs are sidelined in favor of a narrow definition of housing production.

The public's ability to meaningfully participate in shaping our neighborhoods should not be viewed as a barrier to progress. Rather, it is the foundation of a just and inclusive planning system. If we truly want to build a more equitable city, we must preserve mechanisms that allow for thoughtful engagement—not eliminate them.

As you and your fellow Commissioners continue your important work, we urge you to consider the vital role that public review plays in ensuring that development in New York City is smarter, more sustainable, and more equitable. We respectfully request that any proposed Charter revisions maintain strong safeguards for public input and uphold the essential checks and balances that make our city's planning process accountable to its people.

Thank you for the opportunity to share our perspective. FRIENDS looks forward to engaging further and ensuring that the values of transparency, equity, and community engagement remain central to any changes recommended by this Commission.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Nuha Ansari', with a stylized flourish at the end.

**Nuha Ansari**  
Executive Director