

What plaNYC Does Not Do

by Dave Lutz

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Let's give the mayor credit for all the good ideas in his visionary 2030 plan - and not just when it comes to transportation. The Open Space section of the plan also has important recommendations. One million new trees in 10 years will clean our air and waterways, improve our health and cool our sidewalks, schoolyards and parkland. The [GreenStreets program](#) has helped us imagine our city as a greener place. It will be expanded with new "plazas" in some neighborhoods. A number of long neglected city parks will see funding and finally be usable. Parking lots will be required to plant shade trees.

But a "visionary" document that adds a million people to New York with no significant new parkland is unacceptable. New York has less than half the parkland per capita of most other U.S. cities, and our parks are far more crowded because so many of us live in high-rise buildings with no backyards. The report notes that New York grew in population so quickly that neighborhoods like Flatbush (and many others) developed without public space, then it suggests we place what remains of public land in the hands of developers because we need more housing.

Yes, we need more affordable housing. But we also need a public waterfront with token additions of housing, not massive rows of skyscrapers or big-box strip malls with token private esplanades. Our waterfront and our few regional parks are the lungs of our city, which give us places to go for rejuvenation and physical activity. Housing should be built inland, where the subways are. When railroad yards are decked for housing, as the report recommends, 50 percent of the deck should be added to public space. Many of our subway and railyards are in neighborhoods that are significantly underserved by parkland. With good planning, we can have housing and provide a healthy environment.

The report does not mention [community gardening](#). Opportunities for gardening should be increased in our city. Any food grown here does not have to be shipped to New Yorkers by truck. Gardening is a superb physical activity, which can also keep New Yorkers mentally healthy. Everyone who wants a garden should have one whether the goal is food or urban beautification.

New York's visionary 350-mile [Greenways system](#) should be extended and quickly completed. New York and Mayor Michael Bloomberg have worked to get greenways on the ground, but there has been much administrative foot dragging. Finishing our greenways by 2030 would have been a great goal for a more sustainable city.

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Bloomberg, who noted that no one has ever called him a tree-hugger, has set the bar by calling for a "greener greater New York." If recommendations of PlaNYC are implemented, our waterways will be cleaner and we will have more opportunities for swimming and boating. We will drive less and have a better transit system. New buildings will use less energy. Land will be purchased upstate to protect our drinking water supply. Our streets will more often be tree-lined and some long neglected parkland will be made more useful.

No doubt well-funded lobbies will be working to knock the bar down as they already have by getting City Council to [limit the number of pollution-free pedicabs](#) on our streets. It is now our job to take the opposite tack and to get this mayor and his successors to raise the bar, not lower it.

Dave Lutz is the executive director of [Neighborhood Open Space Coalition](#), which works for a healthier, greener city.

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