

# **New York City's PlaNYC Initiative: Does Greener Really Mean Greater?**

**By Donovan Finn**

## ***SUSTAINABILITY WATCH WORKING PAPERS - #6***

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## **Introduction**

New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg argues that his aggressive new PlaNYC 2030 initiative will create “the first environmentally sustainable 21st-century city,” that is “stronger, healthier, cleaner, greener, and greater than ever.” The flagship product of Bloomberg's recently created Mayor's Office of Long-term Planning and Sustainability, PlaNYC focuses on an ambitious range of environmental issues including open space,

brownfields, water quality, transportation, energy, air and climate change. Employing the rhetoric of plans in the title of this ambitious agenda, the mayor's office also positions planning as a critical and important activity in the modern urban political economy, arguing on the initiative's website that, "It is time to PLAN again for New York City's future. It is our city. It is our responsibility. And it is our choice," (emphasis in original).

Where his predecessor Rudolph Guiliani was a self-styled "crime" and "quality of life" mayor, Bloomberg has taken on environmental sustainability as a key issue of his mayoralty of North America's largest city. Community and advocacy groups across the city's political spectrum have signed on as supporters of PlaNYC, and my own experience suggests that Bloomberg has helped put planning, environmental and development issues on the lips of average New Yorkers to a degree unprecedented in the recent past. An equally vocal army of observers, though, has been highly critical of both the plan and the process (or lack thereof) by which PlaNYC was developed.

Despite longstanding and ongoing critiques of their efficacy and in an age which planners are seen more and more as translators, facilitators and mediators among competing stakeholder groups (Friedman, 1993), plans as an artifact and tool of planning continues to possess a particular salience. Plans, as Neuman (1998) notes, are an inextricable part of what planners do: "Planning is blessed with an active verb for its name, a characteristic it shares with other professions that nurture and bring things into being: nursing, engineering, design. City planners bring cities to life and life to cities, and have done so for centuries using plans," (p. 215). In a modern era increasingly focused on mitigating the ecological externalities of urban life, plans also have the potential to be a powerful tool for addressing these issues, and this rhetoric is thoroughly engaged by the authors of the ambitious PlaNYC.

However visionary and sweeping it may be, PlaNYC's critics have leveled powerful critiques against Bloomberg's agenda, including lack of a transparent and participatory process, over-emphasis on technology-based solutions to environmental issues, and an implicit faith in economic development to provide the necessary "trickle-down" effects for overcoming both structural and highly place-based issues that complicate planning a more environmentally benign metropolis of over 8 million residents. These conflicts, though, are not necessarily unique to PlaNYC. For over a decade, planning observers such as Susan Owens (1994) have argued that physical planning and environmental protection have many obvious overlaps, but that reliance on planning's assumed efficacy to facilitate environmentally conscious decisions holds great risk, noting that, "Planning is contained within, and constrained by, economic and political forces and priorities on a wider stage," (p. 440). New York is a place where these economic and political forces, and their power to shape decisions and actions, are writ particularly large. As already suggested by some critics of PlaNYC, a conflation of physical planning and sustainable environmentalism coupled with Bloomberg's autocratic governing style risk resulting in a plan that fails not only as a replicable model for ecologically focused planning in other places but also as yet another exercise in top-down utopian planning not usefully tied to the existing realities and power structures of modern urban development, becoming

merely another wolf in green clothing or what Owens (1994) calls “rhetoric plus business as usual,” (p. 442).

This case study provides an overview of the process and goals of PlaNYC and examines its utility as a policy tool for advancing the ideals of sustainable urbanism. Using archival sources, observation of public meetings and interviews with local planners and advocates I examine how and if this aggressive environmental agenda addresses the conflicts inherent in a broader conception of sustainable urban development as well as the ethical, political and values-oriented aspects critical to plan making and planning practice (Owens, 1994). The sweeping scope, ecological focus and institutional support for PlaNYC exhibit a renewed faith in the ability of planning to create environmentally responsible, vibrant and healthy urban places. Casting a critical lens on PlaNYC offers an opportunity to better understand the role of such initiatives within a more holistic definition of sustainable urbanism.

PlaNYC, I will argue, is an important object of analysis because it is among the most ambitious plans for advancing sustainability at the local level that has been seen, at least in the US context. Its eventual success or failure therefore has important lessons for cities across the nation as they attempt to deal with the same or similar issues in their own local contexts and within a political economy defined by strong home rule and a capitalist democracy. Moreover, the lessons of New York City are also potentially useful for the other mega-cities across the globe that face many of the same challenges to sustainability as New York due to their size and complexity in comparison to smaller urban agglomerations.

The paper proceeds as follows. I first outline briefly the process by which PlaNYC was created, and present an overview of its content. I then examine the utility of the plan as a sustainable development tool using the theoretical model of sustainability proposed by Campbell (1996). I conclude with a set of research questions derived from the exploratory case study that might be used to study the questions addressed here in more detail and complexity.

### **Developing a sustainability plan for NYC**

Bloomberg announced the PlaNYC initiative on Earth Day, April 22, 2007 at a press conference in the American Museum of Natural History. The *New York Times* reported on the event with the following lede in the next day’s issue:

In a quarter-century plan to create what he called “the first environmentally sustainable 21st-century city,” Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg proposed a sweeping and politically contentious vision yesterday of 127 projects, regulations and innovations for New York and the region.

A year later that description the plan as both “sweeping and politically contentious” appears presciently apt. One of the lynchpin projects of the 127-point plan, congestion pricing for central Manhattan, was killed a year later by a State Assembly that declined to

bring the matter to a vote. And the plan has continued to come under increasing scrutiny from many vocal stakeholders in the region who feel that the plan is deeply flawed. Some of the substantive critiques of the plan itself are addressed in detail below, but an exploration of the development of the plan itself is also illustrative of why it is so contentious to many local observers.

PlaNYC was created by a small office appointed by Mayor Bloomberg specifically to develop the 2030 plan: the Mayor's Office of Long-term Planning and Sustainability. Notably, this department is not a part of, nor otherwise affiliated with, the New York Department of City Planning. In an ongoing series, Sustainability Watch, in the online magazine *Gotham Gazette*, vocal PlaNYC critic and Hunter College professor Tom Angotti reports that the plan's genesis was in a report done in early 2006 done by the city's former City Planning Commissioner (Alex Garvin) under contract to the New York City Economic Development Corporation. Garvin's study, *Visions for New York City: Housing and the Public Realm*, included the forecast for 1 million new residents in New York by 2030, which has been the driving rationale for the subsequent PlaNYC. On August 27 of 2006, Thomas Lueck of The New York Observer reported on the leak of Garvin's plan to a local blogger and called it a "nearly covert effort by the Bloomberg administration," that was "believed to be just one of a handful of reports that various consultants are preparing for the strategic plan, and was secret until Aug. 16, when Aaron Naparstek, a writer, posted it on StreetsBlog."<sup>1</sup> Visionary as it may be, this secretive start to the PlaNYC signaled some of the critiques that have since been relentlessly leveled against the process.

The Office of Long Term Planning and Sustainability was created the following month (i.e. September 2007), and PlaNYC unveiled seven months later. Angotti reports that the plan was probably prepared by the management consulting firm of McKinsey and Company, though he was not able to confirm this; PlaNYC cites only "The City of New York/Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg" as authoring entity and the contract for creation of the plan is only available through a Freedom of Information Act request. The director of Long-Term Planning and Sustainability, Rohit "Rit" Aggarwala was a McKinsey and Company employee before moving to his position in the Mayor's office in September of 2006.

As mentioned above, the plan is seemingly authorless, and also free of acknowledgments or any other way to understand how the plan was developed, which is only one aspect of the plan that has troubled some observers and critics. In a review of the plan in the *Journal of Planning Education and Research*, for instance, Seymour Mandelbaum notes that, "The final page of the text thanks—without naming—the participants in an 'enormous collaborative effort.' I wish the account were fuller. How did the authors manage the collaboration, and how do they now imagine managing the process of implementation?" (p. 231). A short narrative on page 10 of the plan mentions assistance

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<sup>1</sup> The leaked copy of Garvin's plan is available at <http://www.streetsblog.org/2006/08/16/the-first-look-at-bloombergs-sweeping-new-vision-for-nyc/>

from, “The Mayor’s Sustainability Advisory Board, composed of some of the city’s leading environmental, business, community and legislative leaders,”<sup>2</sup> as well as “scientists and professors at the Earth Institute at Columbia University, the City University of New York, and elsewhere,” (PlaNYC, p. 10). Finally, there is a mention of “thousands of ideas sent by email,” “over a thousand citizens, community leaders and advocates who came to our meetings to express opinions” and a claim that the unnamed authors, “met with over 100 advocates and community organizations, held 11 town hall meetings, and delivered presentations around the city,” (PlaNYC, p. 10).

This public process, or lack of it, has been the basis of some of the most sustained criticism of PlaNYC thus far. Angotti, for instance, argues that, “While the mayor’s office organized focus groups to test its ideas, the plan was never officially approved, as long-term plans are in other New York municipalities and just about everywhere in the nation,” (2008); at a forum about PlaNYC at New York’s Municipal Art Society (MAS) on April 14, 2008, Angotti called the town hall meetings, “screenings of the mayor’s slide show.”

Some of the other panelists at the MAS forum felt that their organizations were, in fact, usefully and adequately included as stakeholders in the process, but others shared Angotti’s views<sup>3</sup>. Some panelists at the MAS event described the town hall meetings as, “too short and too top down,” “horrible,” and “insulting.” Jeanne DuPont, Executive Director of the Rockaway Waterfront Alliance, even claimed that the plan, “came out of nowhere and stole a bunch of our ideas.” This refrain, too, is common in the critiques of PlaNYC, namely that it promotes a vision of the city that many advocacy groups have long been working hard to promote, but without any explicit mention of the years of groundwork laid by these organizations, often in opposition to the same municipal government that has now adopted (co-opted?) many of their tactics.

While Angotti argued at the MAS forum that the process (or lack thereof) for PlaNYC was actually a façade created “to sell a plan that was already made,” alluding to Garvin’s economic development plan, it is at least conceivable that the failings are not actually insidious, but merely an artifact of ignorance or incompetence (or, possibly, all three). I have thus far been unable to procure a full staff listing of the Office of Long Term Planning and Sustainability, but Director Aggarwala is not a trained planner (he holds an MBA and a PhD in history), suggesting that he may have little knowledge of modern norms of participatory planning. Likewise he is not beholden to even the modicum of ethical conduct outlined in the American Planning Association’s (APA) Code of Ethics. At least some of Aggarwala’s staff are trained as planners. However, at a public presentation of PlaNYC on March 31, 2008, a staff member of the department (with graduate training as an urban designer) answered an audience question by noting that she had been put in charge of the public participation and outreach aspects of the plan, and, “didn’t really know much about,” such processes, offering only that she learned as she

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<sup>2</sup> See Appendix 1 for list of the Advisory Board members, available on the PlaNYC website but not in the plan itself.

<sup>3</sup> This same split is notable in the interviews with informants for this study as well.

went along that making presentations and letting people ask questions afterward did not seem to be eliciting many fruitful responses and that she attempted to design more participatory and dialogue-based meetings as the process evolved.

Whether Angotti is right and the mayor created PlaNYC merely to promote a pre-existing development plan, or whether the process failed to use a more publicly participatory model as a result of bad judgment, a few points appear to be consistent in critiques of the process of developing the plan. First, the ownership and creation process of the document itself is unclear at best and shadowy at worst: who wrote it? who participated? what was the process of this participation? Knowing and understanding who wrote and consulted on the plan is an important aspect of understanding the context of the document and one that is not possible, or at least not at all easy, in this case. Second, as many others have already pointed out, the actual process or actions intended to facilitate participation (town hall meetings and presentations, chiefly) seem to have been poorly designed, and very much in a “top-down” or “listen and react” vein, instead of a more participatory model. Finally, even the outreach that *was* done to include citizens in the process was lackluster. For instance, The New York Chapter of the American Planning Association’s Diversity Committee authored a letter to the Mayor’s office in March of 2007 pointing out that marketing for public participation opportunities was largely nonexistent, overly reliant on the media (instead of, for instance, an advertising campaign on mass transit vehicles) and what little marketing material existed was only available in English. Conversely, many local advocacy groups have posted glowing letters of support on their organization websites thanking the Mayor’s office for including them in the process. Some groups have even lauded PlaNYC with awards, such as the Solar One Green Energy, Arts and Education Center, which honored the plan at their 2008 annual fundraising event, Revelry by the River. As these examples begin to illustrate, those organizations that value community-based processes appear to have a more mixed view of PlaNYC than those organizations which focus more on one particular aspect of urban development, such as Solar One’s emphasis on green energy. For that organization, having a Mayor emphasizing their own mission as part of the city’s mission is empowering no matter the process by which the plan was designed.

Interview subjects for this project had mixed feelings about the participation model used. One wondered whether a truly participatory process was actually tenable in a city of 8.2 million, and in which real estate and development costs are so exorbitant and in which developers thus marshal powerfully outsized marketing and spin campaigns to counter even the loudest community voices. Calling participatory processes in such an environment a potential “fig leaf,” she asked, “So, in the end, is PlaNYC any worse than a truly participatory process that never gets implemented?” She went on to observe that New York has an ingrained “culture of representation” that may in some ways make a process that focuses on stakeholder group representatives a more viable process than a truly bottom-up approach. These and other questions about the viability of the process used to develop PlaNYC will be addressed in a subsequent section; first, I will address the content of the plan itself and investigate the implications of the 127 components that comprise the Mayor’s agenda.

## Inside PlaNYC

To call PlaNYC a “plan” is somewhat of a misnomer. It is actually a detailed, 127-point agenda for achieving a set of environmentally focused goals established by the mayor’s office. At the aforementioned public presentation of the plan on March 31, 2008, in fact, the staff member from the Office Long-term Planning and Sustainability admitted as much when she responded to a question about the name, saying, “We know it’s really an agenda, but the word ‘plan’ has a lot of weight with people.” The plan (agenda?) is filled with eye-catching graphics, and innumerable charts, tables, photographs and other visuals.<sup>4</sup> As befits an action agenda and not a plan, the 155-page document possesses few of the features commonly expected in a comprehensive plan – no description of the process, no future land use map, no community vision. Furthermore, the Plan is predicated on a single growth scenario of 1 million new residents added to New York’s city’s current 8.2 million by 2030, and no methodology for this forecast is provided. The New York Metro Chapter of the APA, among other parties, has suggested that the plan would be more valuable if it were based on multiple possible future scenarios instead of the single projection provided.

The plan spends only nine pages (of 155) on background information before staking out the agenda. As mentioned previously, this leaves little room to explain the methodology for creating the plan or the forecasts on which it is based. The New York APA’s Diversity Committee also faults the plan for failing to include “a publicly available assessment of existing conditions as they relate to the issues the Plan seeks to address.” Though the plan does not begin with a traditional “existing conditions” report, it does contain a fairly detailed analysis of existing conditions woven throughout the plan in the form of more than a hundred tables and graphs, over half of which are credited to agencies outside the Mayor’s Office, including the NYC Department of Parks and Recreation, the NYC Office of Emergency Management, the US Census, the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, and others.

The 127 items on Bloomberg’s sustainability agenda are divided into six sections with ten nested subsections:

- Land (Housing, Open Space, Brownfields)
- Water (Water Quality, Water Network)
- Transportation (Congestion, State of Good Repair)
- Energy (Energy)
- Air (Air Quality)
- Climate Change (Climate Change)

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<sup>4</sup> Free, full color copies are available at New York City Hall and on the web at <http://www.nyc.gov/html/planyc2030/html/downloads/download.shtml>

Each subsection of the plan contains an orienting statement or goal, followed by a set of what PlaNYC’s authors call “Initiatives,” that is, the objectives or actions intended to help meet the goal. These Initiatives form the backbone of the plan.

For example, the first subsection of the plan, under the theme of Land, is Housing. The stated goal is to “Create homes for almost a million more New Yorkers, while making housing more affordable and more sustainable.” The 12-point “plan” for housing is comprised of the following Initiatives:

Continue publicly-initiated rezonings

- 1 Pursue transit-oriented development
- 2 Reclaim underutilized waterfronts
- 3 Increase transit options to spur development

Create new housing on public land

- 4 Expand co-locations with government agencies
- 5 Adapt outdated buildings to new uses

Explore additional areas of opportunity

- 6 Develop underused areas to knit neighborhoods together
- 7 Capture the potential of transportation infrastructure investments
- 8 Deck over railyards, rail lines, and highways

Expand targeted affordability programs

- 9 Develop new financing strategies
- 10 Expand inclusionary zoning
- 11 Encourage homeownership
- 12 Preserve the existing stock of affordable housing throughout New York City

(PlaNYC, p. 19)

The 127 Initiatives are explained in detail and each one is outlined in roughly one page of text, as well as copious accompanying graphics. The final ten pages of the plan consists of a matrix containing every Initiative (many with accompanying sub-initiatives) and its appointed lead agency at the city, outside actions needed for completion (e.g. new state legislation), completion milestones, existing NYC funding on capital and operating budgets, and possible other funding sources. In April of 2008, the Mayor’s Office released the PlaNYC Progress Report 2008, a 40-page document outlining the progress to date on the 127 Initiatives.

### **Utility of PlaNYC as a sustainable development tool**

Given the cogent arguments by Neuman (1998) Campbell and Fainstein (2003) and others that plans continue to be a critical part of the act of planning, and the growing ubiquity of sustainability as an orienting paradigm for planning, I sought to understand how, or if, PlaNYC helped contribute to the sustainability of development in New York City. Since the plan is too new to quantitatively assess its impact, I chose instead to address this question by trying to understand how the plan maps onto existing theory of what we currently understand sustainable urbanism to be, and what planners’ roles are within that framework. For this project, I have conducted analysis of press clippings,

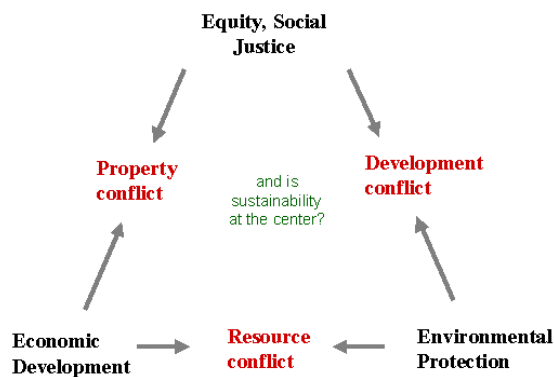
web-log (“blog”) posts, and publicly available statements and position papers about the plan, attended public forums about the plan and other New York area development issues, and conducted interviews with seven local planners and advocates involved in local issues that intersect with the plan. The purpose of this exploratory stage of the study was to begin developing a framework for understanding the utility of the plan and to create a more refined set of research questions for a more in-depth analysis; this work is ongoing.

Because the purpose of these early interviews and analysis was exploratory and designed to help create a more nuanced set of research questions, I chose the rather simple but compelling model of sustainable planning proposed by Campbell (1996). In his oft-cited article, “Green Cities, Growing Cities, Just Cities? Urban Planning and the Contradictions of Sustainable Development,” Campbell argues that the planners’ roles in sustainable development should focus on balancing the three corners of a triangular model. Situating the natural environment, a robust economy and social equity at the three poles, Campbell illustrates how the three are both interlinked and competing aspects of the goal of sustainable development and argues that, instead of focusing on one pole, planners should develop expertise in mediating among each corner of his Planner’s Triangle. To this end, he argues, “planners need to combine both their procedural and their substantive skills and thus become central players in the battle over growth, the environment, and social justice.”

In the context of New York City, Campbell’s model has particular salience. In America’s largest city, which is also located at the core of the United States’ largest metropolitan region, the issues Campbell highlights are amplified by a matter of degrees in comparison to most other cities. The wealthy are wealthier, the poor more destitute. Stakeholders are more diverse along demographic lines. Opportunities for compact, transit-oriented and walkable development are commonplace, but the aggregated environmental externalities of such a large and dense population are likewise powerfully concentrated. Finding a balance among the competing elements of Campbell’s model is more difficult, more critical, and perhaps more possible in New York. I use the data acquired in this first stage of investigation to ask the question, how does PlaNYC help to address the barriers to sustainable development outlined by Campbell, and how do these understandings help us contribute to the ongoing dialogue about sustainable urbanism? The following sections illustrate how and if PlaNYC addresses these challenges and opportunities.

**Figure 1: Triangular model of sustainable development (Campbell, 1996)**

Planners address three fundamental priorities:  
And three resulting conflicts...



## Economic development

Campbell defines the economic development planner as one who “sees the city as a location where production, consumption, distribution, and innovation take place. The city is in competition with other cities for markets and for new industries. Space is the economic space of highways, market areas, and commuter zones.” If PlaNYC were a tool only to meet the goals of the economic development planner, initial research suggests that it would be rated as a success.

As Angotti has noted, PlaNYC’s genesis appears to have been an earlier Economic Development Corporation plan by Alex Garvin. That plan proposes strategies to create 325,000 new housing units to house the 1 million expected new residents in the next 20-25 years. Such an ambitious housing plan would clearly influence the local economy significantly, bringing not only construction jobs but also the economic multipliers inherent in a 10% population increase.

Specific initiatives in the plan would also pump public money into the economy, including, “decking over rail lines, rail yards and highways” (Housing, Initiative 8), “complete underdeveloped destination parks,” (Open Space, Initiative 3), “create or enhance a public plaza in every community (Open Space, Initiative 6), “complete water tunnel #3,” (Water, Initiative 7) and many other capital projects outlined in the plan that would potentially result in billions of dollars in public money being spent on civic infrastructure. Meanwhile, initiatives such as “strengthen energy and building codes,” (Energy, Initiative 3) would result in spending by private owners on upgrades. Most of the interview subjects I spoke to had little to complain about if they were rating the plan solely as an economic development plan. Said one, “If that’s all it was supposed to be, it would be a pretty good plan.” However, the image of the plan promoted by the mayor’s office positions PlaNYC much, much more than just an economic development plan. This mismatch between rhetoric and the perceived reality of the plan’s purpose by many outside observers, especially planners, has been relentless; by using the word plan and implying that PlaNYC is akin to a comprehensive sustainability plan, the Mayor and his allies have in many ways alienated potential allies. If they had simply called it “Economic Development PlaNYC,” they might have experienced a much less withering backlash. The mere connection between “planning” and this document, as much as

anything, has been at the heart of its ongoing critical evaluation.

## **The environment**

“The environmental planner,” says Campbell, “sees the city as a consumer of resources and a producer of wastes. The city is in competition with nature for scarce resources and land, and always poses a threat to nature. Space is the ecological space of greenways, river basins, ecological niches.” Although it is called “a comprehensive sustainability plan for the City’s future,” on the PlaNYC website, and the subtitle of the plan is, “a greener, greater New York,” the validity of these claims merit further investigation.

Amy Zimmer, a reporter from NY Metro newspaper who moderated the April 2008 MAS forum on PlaNYC noted in her opening remarks that, if nothing else, PlaNYC may already be a successful environmental sustainability tool because it has made “being green” a household conversation. Though this may be due to the plan’s large marketing budget more than anything else, this theme was common in the interviews conducted with local planners and activists. One interviewee felt that it was very important that the language and mission of local environmental groups are now enmeshed in official city documents and that the long and sustained efforts of these groups were now being publicly validated. Another interviewee noted that community groups (or at least those with existing capacity to do so) now had a powerful tool and venue through which to request money or other support for local projects.

Some interview subjects pointed to other potential beneficiaries of the plan: professional planners and designers working with the city and public bureaucracies. Though many of these professionals had long been frustrated, bored, or even alarmed at the pace and direction of the projects to which they were assigned, interviewees now report working with city planners who have feeling of having been “liberated” and finally getting to do the kinds of projects they were trained for or felt they were ethically obligated to do. Others spoke of the current planning environment within city departments as a “frenzy” or a “footrace” to spend allocated funds and “get a shovel in the ground” before Mayor Bloomberg leaves office at the end of December, 2009. One interviewee explained that the excitement level among public sector planners was because the mayor had provided substantial funding for projects to a degree that was almost unknown previously, noting, “This is a real opportunity for positive change, and no other city has this much money to funnel into these kinds of projects.” One effect of PlaNYC, then, is that it is allowing the city’s own professionals to seize the opportunity to initiate the kinds of projects that they and others have long been advocating, and has placed many of these professionals in a position where they can build partnerships with like-minded advocacy groups where no such possibilities existed previously.

Despite the many benefits of the plan to New York’s natural environment, though, most observers and interview subjects remain no more than cautiously optimistic about the long-term benefits of the plan. Miquela Craytor of the advocacy group Sustainable South Bronx observed at the MAS forum that it seemed like city agencies were really just going along with the same kind of projects they’d always done, but topped with a “green bow.”

Many interview subjects were also critical of the plan's environmental focus. One community planner was particularly passionate, pointing out that the plan had, "some good ideas, but most of them are old news," and that the plan has, "no 'oomph,' it's too thin, it's not radical or visionary enough, this is New York City, we should be on the cusp of new ideas and strategies." She concluded by calling the plan, "A failure of imagination." Another interviewee noted that environmental issues and solutions are inherently local and place-based, and that for the most part the content of PlaNYC, "feels like it could have been written for any city in the country."

Advocacy groups across the city, while generally supportive of the plan, likewise seem to feel that the plan is useful, yet holds the potential to be even better. A 2008 report, *Building a Greener Future: A Progress Report on New York City's Sustainability Initiatives*, by The New York League of Conservation Voters Education Fund calls PlaNYC a "spectacular leap forward" (p. 3). They continue, however, that Bloomberg's plan does not go far enough in most of its goals, that it is wholly insufficient in areas such as sustainable agriculture and solid waste management (p. 5-6) and that, "despite the significant progress made in the last year, much still needs to be done," (p. 31).

Testifying before the New York City Council in January of 2007, Nancy Anderson, Executive Director of the non-profit Sallan Foundation called PlaNYC's goal of reducing New York's carbon emissions, "good, but not good enough," and recommended the city be more aggressive and set a goal of carbon neutrality by 2030 to match the U.S. Conference of Mayor's 2006 goal. Anderson also advocated for a more comprehensive high performance green building law to make green building New York's "new normal," especially for the many new mega projects that will be necessary to facilitate the 500,000 new housing units called for in PlaNYC. Like many other observers, Anderson's remarks are couched in optimism for PlaNYC's environmental focus. But she points to many of the gaps in the plan which could derail all of the green rhetoric if the plan is not made a permanent part of city policy, noting that, "The big picture projected in PLANYC 2030 must be translated into enforceable laws and become integral elements of the City's Building Code and Zoning Resolution," if it is to be useful and sustainable.

There is perhaps no more vivid example of PlaNYC's unrealized potential for beneficial environmental change than, "Transportation Initiative 10: Pilot congestion pricing." Based on the London model of charging drivers to enter the CBD (in New York's case, the area of Manhattan below 60<sup>th</sup> Street from 6am-6pm on weekdays). The proposed eight-dollar toll (\$21 for trucks) was slated to go directly into transit funding, though critics continually pointed out that this was never a codified part of the proposal. Traffic within the congestion pricing zone was expected to decrease by 6.3% and speeds to increase by 7.2% (PlaNYC p. 89). The purpose of this paper is not to debate the merits of congestion pricing as proposed, but such a sweeping program, if well designed and implemented, did have the potential to greatly reduce the city's carbon footprint and associated externalities. However, Bloomberg's proposed congestion pricing project was criticized from the outset by all sides. Drivers felt unfairly burdened, outer borough neighborhoods feared that their streets would become de facto "park and ride" destinations, transit advocates feared an increase in ridership but no service increases,

midtown retailers feared a loss of business, and even many supporters of the theory of congestion pricing felt that the specific plan was ill conceived and stood little chance of passing the city council or of succeeding as promised. The proposal, which required state assembly approval, died in committee in Albany in April of 2007.

As the observations of many local experts and observers suggests, and as the congestion pricing case illustrates, PlaNYC contains an impressive array of initiatives that would help advance the environmental component of Campbell's tri-part sustainability model. Indeed, protecting and enhancing the natural environment is the stated goal of the plan, and global climate change is promoted as the underlying rationale for all of the proposed initiatives. But as comments by local experts familiar with the mayor's plan illustrate, the utility of these proposals in the long term is uncertain at best. The plan has undeniably put environmental issues on the governmental, civic and business agendas of New Yorkers. Local planners and activists concerned with environmental issues are seeing their work validated with funding and other opportunities in unprecedented ways. But the environmental content of the plan is perhaps less impressive in its depth than its breadth, the plan has not yet been ingrained in the city's codes and other enforcement mechanisms, and as congestion pricing illustrates, the nuts and bolts of the plan have been largely developed in a top-down fashion by the Mayor and a small cadre of advisors. This top-down approach to planning was a critical reason for the defeat of congestion pricing, and illustrates a potential weakness of many other initiatives in the plan. In the final analysis, it may be less important *what* the environmental components of the plan are than *how* they were developed and if any are achieved as a result. This theme is investigated more fully in a subsequent section.

### **Equitable development**

The final corner of Campbell's triangular sustainability model is the equity component. Campbell defines the equity planner as one who, "sees the city as a location of conflict over the distribution of resources, of services, and of opportunities. The competition is within the city itself, among different social groups. Space is the social space of communities, neighborhood organizations, labor unions: the space of access and segregation." This aspect of PlaNYC has been forcefully critiqued by observers as well as the interview subjects I spoke to for this paper.

Among the most vigilant observers of the plan has been the *Gotham Gazette*, whose Sustainability Watch has been an ongoing source of observation and critique for over a year. Articles by Angotti and others have included titles such as, "What PlaNYC Does Not Do," "Waterfront Development or Neighborhood Displacement?" "Building In The Wrong Places," "Passing the 'Do-Ability' Test," and "A Plan for Misplaced Development." Many of these articles point directly to the disconnect between Bloomberg's PlaNYC and the many pressing equity issues that face New Yorkers, from gentrification and affordable housing to environmental injustice. Another source of criticism has been the New York Chapter of the APA. While the public letter to Office of Long Term Planning and Sustainability Director Aggarwala by the full chapter mentions the need for more transparency, outreach and education as part of the plan, it is the

chapter's Diversity Committee whose public comment letter is substantially more critical. The letter opens with the observation that, "The Plan is silent on one of the most important qualities of life in New York City: diversity," and goes on to assail the public participation process and transparency of the plan. The most sustained critique is focused on the Housing aspect of the plan, presenting detailed arguments why, "The Plan does not sufficiently address the complex problems of affordable housing and the desegregation that is occurring throughout the City, where lower income people are forced to the edge of the City and into neighboring communities in the metropolitan area."

Other elements of the equity issue are questioned by advocates such as the public policy group Urban Agenda, who argue in their public statement that PlaNYC, while laudable for many of its initiatives, is too focused on residential development at the detriment of industrial and light industrial land uses. Arguing for more of a focus on "green jobs" and space to house them, the statement suggests that, "Diversifying – as well as growing – New York City's economy will help improve its social sustainability and provide a greater buffer against the inevitable ups and downs of the financial sector."

Urban Agenda's statement points to another conundrum inherent in Bloomberg's plan. In the Introduction to PlaNYC, its authors state:

If you seek to solve traffic congestion by building more roads or by expanding mass transit, you make a choice that changes the city. If you care about reducing carbon emissions, that suggests some energy solutions rather than others. If your concern is not only the amount of housing that is produced, but how it impacts neighborhoods and who can afford it, then your recommendations will vary.

That is why in searching for answers, we have wrestled not only with the physical constraints New York will face over two decades, but also with the fundamental values implicit in those policy choices. We have taken as a basic value that economic opportunity can and must come out of growth; that diversity of all kinds can and must be preserved; that a healthy environment is not a luxury good, but a fundamental right essential to creating a city that is fair, healthy, and sustainable. (PlaNYC, p. 10)

It seems clear that many observers, particularly those who have been dealing with these kinds of issues for many years without the imprimatur of a city-sponsored sustainability plan, remain unconvinced that the city "wrestled" with these hard questions in a sufficient manner. Angotti and other critics have illustrated that PlaNYC emerged at least in part from Garvin's growth plan prepared for the EDC, and as the plan itself notes, "We have taken as a basic value that economic opportunity can and must come out of growth," which may be read it two ways. One interpretation of the (unknown) authors' intent is that "if we are going to have growth, we need to have opportunity for everyone," but another interpretation is, "if economic opportunities are to come about, they can only happen if there is growth." Neither, however, are a *fait accompli*. Herman Daly and Kenneth Townsend (1993), for example, argue forcefully that the term "sustainable growth" is an oxymoron, and that it is development, not growth, that can be made more

sustainable. Their rationale is that, “The term “sustainable development” therefore makes sense for the economy, but only if it is understood as “development without growth — i.e., qualitative improvement of a physical economic base that is maintained in a steady state by a throughput of matter-energy that is within the regenerative and assimilative capacities of the ecosystem,” (p. 267). By focusing on population growth, residential construction, and the development of attendant services, PlaNYC is inherently unsustainable in Daly and Herman’s definition. Urban Agenda and other stakeholders (e.g. The League of Conservation Voters, Sustainable South Bronx, The Sallan Foundation) have specifically pointed to the lack of emphasis on small business development and “green jobs” as major failings of the plan. These kinds of development, as opposed to the high-end residential development, big-box corporate retail and Class A office space that appear to be the focus of current city efforts,<sup>5</sup> would be more in tune with what Daly and other experts in the field call sustainable development.

Local planners and advocates that I interviewed had similar concerns about the plan, but many pointed out that the equity issue was not merely one of development vs. growth or a focus on high quality jobs vs. high-end housing. Lack of an emphasis on preventing gentrification and displacement was by far the most common theme that emerged from the interviews. And it is true that the plan focuses on construction of new housing units and upzoning as two major elements of accommodating new growth. However, upon closer examination, the plan does address issues of affordability, in-place strategies and protecting vulnerable populations throughout the descriptive section of the Housing chapter. Moreover, four of the 127 Initiatives in the plan seem to address many of these issues, at least in part:

- **Housing, Initiative 9:** Develop new financing strategies. Continue to pursue creative financing strategies to reach new income brackets.
- **Housing, Initiative 10:** Expand inclusionary zoning. Seek opportunities to expand the use of inclusionary zoning, harnessing the private market to create economically-integrated communities.
- **Housing, Initiative 11:** Encourage homeownership. Continue to develop programs to encourage homeownership, emphasizing affordable apartments over single-family homes.
- **Housing, Initiative 12:** Preserve the existing stock of affordable housing throughout New York City. Continue to develop programs to preserve the existing affordable housing that so many New Yorkers depend upon today.

These initiatives are probably not adequate to reverse the massive tides of gentrification and displacement currently sweeping across New York City, nor do they wholly refute the argument that PlaNYC is, at its core, a growth plan. However, these initiatives appear to be often overlooked by critics, and though they may not be sufficient, it does appear somewhat disingenuous to claim that PlaNYC makes no effort to protect low and moderate income New Yorkers, given the existence of these four initiatives. Other

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<sup>5</sup> For instance, Willets Point in Queens, and projects such as The Atlantic Yards, Coney Island, the Gowanus Canal and the Red Hook waterfront, in Brooklyn.

criticisms of the plan also emerged from the exploratory interviews. “It’s really just a Manhattan beautification plan,” suggested one community planner, “The ‘less sexy’ boroughs are pretty much left out.” This common perception, though, is also not well supported by looking at the plan. Congestion pricing, admittedly, was focused only on reducing traffic in Manhattan, which is one likely reason for its demise. But most of the other initiatives appear to have citywide benefits (revamped building codes, more use of renewable energy course), or include projects across the five boroughs (new parks, bike lanes, express busses). However, the fact that local planners and other experts have these kinds of conceptions about the plan does is not necessarily a hopeful sign for coalition building and implementation. The fact that the perception exists, even by those familiar with the plan, that it does not address these issues, points to the challenge Bloomberg has and will have in developing allies and avoiding confrontation from advocates and community groups.

Finally, there are the myriad concerns expressed by interview subjects that the plan is simply too focused on physical projects and the reliance on such initiatives to help achieve sustainability; this parallels Owens’ (1994) argument noted in the introduction that physical planning cannot presume efficacy in a complex urban space. The critiques of a physical approach to sustainability planning by New York area observers has three key components: 1) civic capacity for implementation and buy-in is greatly endangered, 2) maintenance of capital projects and programming (education, training, outreach) are under-funded or nonexistent, and 3) the argument that even the most environmentally sensitive aspects of the plan, from park rehabilitation to bike lanes to tree planting, are in fact merely de facto pro-gentrification tactics that are increasingly remaking the city as a more active site of increasingly affluent consumption.

For instance, the same interviewee who noted in a previous section that existing neighborhood and environmental advocacy groups stand to benefit from the initiatives in the plan also noted that there is a flipside to that observation, in which communities without that existing capacity will not benefit, and current lines of inequality will only become more pronounced and rigid. Many of the proposals in the plan only open the door to previously nonexistent projects, but they do not assure them, and this planner suggested that communities without existing capacity will have difficulty reaping the benefits of the plan while more affluent and better organized constituencies will have more success. New street trees, pocket parks and bike lanes will be more likely in neighborhoods that have the existing capacity to work with city agencies to expedite these projects, for example.

She provided the example of \$50 million earmarked for an extensive rehabilitation and expansion project of Highland Park and Ridgewood Reservoir, which straddle the Brooklyn/Queens border. Explaining that the unorganized, mostly Caribbean immigrant community of the area will likely not be able to make a strong enough case for their own needs and desires for the park’s design and programming, she predicted that the park will largely be left in its current natural state for the use of the mostly white, middle and upper class birdwatchers from other parts of the city who prefer the park be left as an unmaintained urban forest and have so far proven more adept at gathering political and

media support for their position. While this case illustrates the many complexities in defining a more sustainable model of urbanism (is Ridgewood Reservoir more important as a wetland and bird habitat or as a recreation area and social space for a neighboring low income community?) it also points to the ways in which Bloomberg plan seems to have failed to address these complexities and foreseeable disagreements over how to proceed into the future. Instead of crafting a process of engagement, community deliberation and localized decision-making, PlaNYC instead uses a simplistic metric and an autocratic approach to prioritize physical projects determined by a shadowy group of experts without a more holistic and communal approach to planning and decision-making.

### **Substantive vs. Procedural Aspects of the Plan**

The previous sections evaluate PlaNYC in order to understand how the plan helps to further the concept of sustainability by examining the content of the plan, or what Campbell calls the “substantive” aspect of sustainable planning. Campbell proposes that planners have two discrete ways in which they can promote sustainability, which he terms the substantive and the procedural parts of their role. Campbell defines planners’ procedural role as the processes by which they “to manage and resolve conflict.” While the analysis of the substantive content of the plan illustrates some mixed success in promoting substantive paths to urban sustainability, it is the process by which the plan was developed that has really been at the core of much of the criticism of the plan. Angotti has been among the plan’s chief detractor’s, particularly on the topic of process, but he is far from alone. The main critique is simple: there was no process. The Diversity Committee of the New York Metro Chapter of the APA states the matter most succinctly: “Citizens’ opportunities for participation in the Plan have been limited to such an extent that the entire participation process is unacceptable.”

The plan was largely developed within the mayor’s office (and, according to Angotti, by McKinsey and Company) without a real dialogue with community groups or citizens at large. Though some of the planners I interviewed noted that they, as “local experts” were invited to various forums, they overwhelmingly defined the process as “top-down” and appearing more to appease advocates than to truly invite and influence the shape and content of the plan. Plan making processes come in many forms, and consultant-authored plans written in secret or with limited opportunities for public engagement are certainly not rare. However, it strikes me as troubling that New York’s sustainability agenda so readily draws upon the efficacy of the term “plan” in order to validate itself, while flying in the face of what so many in the profession would define as the bare minimum for a document to call itself a “plan.”

In their public comment letter to the mayor’s office, for instance, The New York Metro Chapter of the APA offers ten general comments on the PlaNYC process. Fully half (5) of these comments deal directly with the public participation and process aspects of making the plan, from “Increase transparency,” to “Maximize accountability.” My interview subjects largely concurred, with the lack of process emerging as by far the most common and powerful negative assessment of the plan. These critiques fell into two

themes.

First, many interview subjects feared that the lack of a public dialogue means that the substantive parts of the plan were never vetted by a diverse community of stakeholders, and that as a result, conflicts and partisanship will continue to plague the implementation process. The plan is thus placed in greater risk of failing, in much the same way as the congestion pricing initiative. At the MAS forum in April 2008, Paul Steely White of Transportation Alternatives conjectured that congestion pricing failed because it was never defined in human terms but only, like the rest of the plan, in very scientific ways that failed to excite or inspire citizens and activists. Building and generating these types of buy-in from average New Yorkers as well as power brokers is one of the potential benefits from a more participatory process. One interview subject, a community planner, explained that, “The process, or lack of process, has reduced ‘space’ for dialogue, so now the potential of the plan is being wasted.” A focus on community participation, as these examples point out, appears to many local experts to have put the plan’s implementation at risk not so much because people are against the goals of the plan, but because they feel no ownership and investment in them.

The second, related, critique is that by not using a more engaged community process, the mayor and his staff reduced the capacity of local community and advocacy groups, who would have been valuable allies in the implementation portion of the plan. By not using the creation of PlaNYC as an opportunity to build relationships with and among existing community based organizations, the plan failed to harness their skills and assets in creating and implementing this ambitious plan. Similarly, as the previous example of the Highland Park renovation points out, a robust participatory process might have also allowed the mayor to develop capacity and allies where they had not existed previously, such as in immigrant communities.

Although planning in close partnership with the public can be time consuming, frustrating and difficult, especially in a city of 8 million people, the need for such processes have become increasingly important to a holistic definition of planning for sustainability. As the APA letter and my initial interviews suggest, participatory processes are increasingly ingrained in planning practice; this is what planners think that planning is. Though it has already been created, if PlaNYC is to truly capture the idea of a plan to validate the contents, it will be necessary to retroactively engage the public more robustly and equitably in the implementation processes, at the very least.

## **Conclusion**

This paper has looked critically at PlaNYC as a tool for planning a more sustainable New York City and asks what lessons planners can take from Bloomberg’s plan a year into its life and less than 18 months before the mayor is term-limited out of office. My initial exploratory analysis of the issues surrounding PlaNYC suggest that the plan, while visionary and innovative in many ways, suffers from deficiencies that will make implementation in Bloomberg’s waning mayoral term a distinct challenge. Many local advocacy groups have made visible public displays of support for the plan, such as the

over 150 institutional members of the Campaign for New York’s Future<sup>6</sup> which exists to support and implement PlaNYC.

Conversely, as this exploratory analysis has illustrated, there are many local experts and pundits who disagree in whole or in part with the mayor’s plan. One striking observation is that these critiques come from those stakeholders who would be expected to be among the most powerful supporters of such a plan, and this analysis has not even begun to address the opposition to the plan from corporate landowners, automobile advocates, or other interest groups who might see their rights as being infringed upon by the plan. Table 1 outlines some of the main themes emerging from this stage of analysis. The “positive” and “negative” columns emerge from my own analysis of the plan, press accounts and interviews, and are admittedly skewed toward these sources and from a public planning perspective. Special interests such as business owners, delivery drivers, developers and others would likely take a contradictory stance to many of my assertions.

**Table 1: Positive and negative attributes of PlaNYC from exploratory study**

Aspect of the plan	Positive attributes	Negative attributes
<b>Substantive: Economic Sustainability</b>	Plan may well be a good economic development and growth plan	Relies on “trickle-down” benefits
		Lack of emphasis on “green collar jobs”
		Focus on housing will result in industrial displacement
<b>Substantive: Environmental Sustainability</b>	Has made “being green” part of New Yorkers’ daily lives	Merely business as usual with a “green bow”
	Has “liberated” and “empowered” many local planners and advocates	Not innovative enough given the position of NY as world leader in so many arenas
	Ambitious and, at least rhetorically, progressive approach to development for the largest city in the U.S.	Not localized for NYC’s unique social dynamics and spatial opportunities and constraints
		Ideas not aggressive enough
		Environmental tactics not well integrated in official city policy
<b>Substantive: Equity</b>	Some focus on retention and affordability in plan	Perceived lack of focus on gentrification and displacement
		No emphasis on maintaining social diversity
		Conflation of “growth” with “development”
		Physically-based planning without focus on sustainability of programming or maintenance

<sup>6</sup> <http://ga3.org/newyorksfuture/index.html>

		Lack of public education component
		Lack of marketing to marginalized communities (no mass transit advertising, English-only materials, etc)
		Will benefit communities with existing capacity instead of helping to build it
<b>Process</b>	Fast and efficient	No transparency
	Scientific basis for decisions	Unknown methodologies
	Some experts and stakeholders involved	One-way communication and reaction instead of two-way dialogue
		Not participatory, too top-down
		Alienated some potential allies
		Use of single growth projection, not multiple scenarios

In many ways, PlaNYC is like the co-worker that everyone in the office thinks is a jerk, but who has always been nice to you; even though you want to hate him, you have a hard time making yourself overcome your own empirical observations and do so. Despite the many failings of Bloomberg’s PlaNYC, I want it to succeed on some level. It does portend a new direction for New York and for the concept of sustainable urbanism in general. The plan is flawed, certainly, and perhaps fatally so. But, my interest lies in determining what we can learn from this case to help advance planning for holistic sustainability, particularly in one of the world’s largest metropolises in which both the opportunities and difficulties of sustainable planning are magnified exponentially as compared to smaller settlements with more advanced sustainability initiatives, such as Portland, Oregon; Austin, Texas, or even Copenhagen and many other European cities.

This exploratory study has left me with a few questions or themes that I hope to address in a more refined and robust analysis of PlaNYC in the coming months.

First, what people think is important, whether it’s true or not. Many planners I interviewed, as well as public comments and press accounts, argue that PlaNYC does not address equity issues such as gentrification. However, there are substantial aspects of the plan that touch on these issues in whole or in part. While the plan may not be sufficient in this regard, it appears that this is one particular area where Bloomberg’s staff has done a poor job of articulating a vision for the plan, building coalitions, and harnessing the support of existing potential allies. The preceding analysis illustrates why this is the case, but I argue that this gap between perception and reality is in many ways just as important as the critiques that are more easily validated, such as the fact that the plan relies on only a single growth projection or that there is no transparent methodology provided. If PlaNYC cannot even rally the support of those who should be allies because they don’t fully understand the content of the plan, how can Bloomberg ever hope to win the support of real enemies to his plan?

Second, the creation of PlaNYC emerged from an economic development process, was done behind closed doors by consultants, and links specific initiatives to goals. This, then, is a strategic plan in the corporate sense. Bloomberg's history as a corporate entrepreneur is well known. Are there some lessons to be taken from corporate management practice and theory that can help usefully inform planning for sustainable urbanism? If so, what are they, and how can they be integrated with the things that planners hold sacred, such as the ideal of participatory democracy?

Third, are there aspects of environmentally sustainable planning, particularly in very large cities that demand a modified approach to participation? Many interview subjects I spoke with lamented the lack of participatory process in PlaNYC while also admitting how difficult such processes are in New York City, even more so than in other places due to both structural and historical factors. The question arises, then, is a top-down, autocratic approach actually *necessary* to facilitate truly visionary environmentally-sensitive planning in a world of increasingly fragmented special interests and an ever more powerful private sector? Curitiba, Brazil is one of the modern era's most famous and lauded success stories for sustainable urbanism. Yet, the mastermind of that city's move recent changes was mayor Jamie Lerner, who in interviews often explains openly how he pushed his vision through despite the protests of large swaths of citizenry. In one famous episode, Lerner relates how he used children as de facto human shields to block traffic on a downtown street long enough for bulldozers to rip it up and replace it with a pedestrian mall. Another prominent city at the forefront of the environmental sustainability movement, Bogotá, Colombia, which has a population similar to New York City (though in a smaller metro region) has likewise moved in this direction under the leadership of former mayor Enrique Penalosa. However, despite being a lauded humanitarian, Penalosa himself has admitted that some of his successes are more attributable to his own vision than to a participatory process, noting in a Planetizen.com interview in 2005, "Some of our ability to move quickly was because our democracy is not that advanced. It is better to have more participation and democracy, but it does slow things down and makes it hard to make radical changes. It is very possible that if we had had a very advanced, participatory democracy that we would not have been able to move as quickly."<sup>7</sup>

In the next stage of analysis, I hope to expand my interview pool to include a much larger sample of local planners and advocates, and perhaps also include others with different viewpoints, such as developers. I plan to move beyond the simple Campbell model and toward a more useful evaluation criteria that is applicable to the specifics of PlaNYC, drawing on precedents such as those proposed by Baer (1997), Berke, Godschalk and Kaiser (2006) and Berke and Conroy (2004). While aspects of these proposed tools illustrate some utility for evaluating PlaNYC, I also hope to find a way to integrate these frameworks with the research questions mentioned previously in order to understand if PlaNYC is a harbinger of a new paradigm in sustainability planning, or just another example of Owens' (1994) "rhetoric plus business as usual." As a planner, I hope that

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<sup>7</sup> <http://www.planetizen.com/node/17468>

there are useful lessons to take from PlaNYC, and some of these questions may indeed lead to new understandings about creating effective plans for environmentally sustainable cities, particularly very large cities. But I also hope that those aspects of the plan that are useful and effective can co-exist with a model of planning that continues to balance the three aspects of Campbell's model in a manner that is at once useful for creating a robust economy, a thriving natural environment, as well as a city that is more livable, equitable and healthy for citizens across the socio-economic spectrum.

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## APPENDIX 1: Members of Mayor’s Sustainability Advisory Board

Christine Quinn, Speaker of the New York City Council  
James F. Gennaro, Council Member and Chair of the Committee on Environmental Protection  
Carlton Brown, COO and Founder, Full Spectrum  
Marcia Bystryn, Executive Director, New York League of Conservation Voters  
Robert Fox, Partner, Cook + Fox Architects  
Ester Fuchs, Professor of Public Affairs and Political Science at the Columbia University School of International and Public Affairs  
Peter Goldmark, Program Director of NYC Office, Environmental Defense  
Ashok Gupta, Program Director of Air and Energy, Natural Resources Defense Council  
Michael Northrop, Program Officer of Sustainable Development, Rockefeller Brothers Fund  
Ed Ott, Executive Director, NYC Central Labor Council  
Elizabeth Girardi Schoen, Senior Director of Environmental Affairs, Pfizer, Inc.  
Peggy Sheppard, Executive and Co-Founder, West Harlem Environmental Action Coalition (WE ACT)  
Daniel Tishman, Chairman and CEO, Tishman Construction Corporation  
Kathryn Wylde, President and CEO, Partnership for New York City  
Robert Yaro, President, Regional Plan Association  
Elizabeth Yeampierre, Executive Director, UPROSE