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Gale A. Brewer, Borough President

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**Testimony of Manhattan Borough President Gale A. Brewer before the
City Council Subcommittee on Zoning and Franchises**

**Special Inwood District Rezoning | L.U. Items 135-2018 -- 140-2018
ULURP Application Nos. C 180205 ZRM, C 180204 ZMM, C 180206 PPM,
C 180207 PQM, C 180208 HAM**

Good afternoon Chair Moya, members of the Subcommittee on Zoning and Franchises, and Council Member Rodriguez.

The City's rezoning proposal has generated enormous concerns and fears among Inwood residents, many of whom are at income levels below the city's average and many of whom are immigrants, and they are worried that this rezoning proposal will either cause or hasten gentrification.

These concerns are justified. Inwood has the highest concentration of rent regulated apartments in Manhattan and about 30 percent of those apartments are subject to preferential rents – meaning that at any time a tenant can get a large rent increase that they may not be able to afford. Inwood has a "downtown strip," known as the Commercial U, that is reminiscent of a neighborhood's Main Street. And, unlike in other parts of the city, in Inwood, gentrification is happening rapidly not through development, but through the attrition of affordable housing and the influx of newer residents searching for more affordable Manhattan rents. So if we are going to encourage significant new development we have an obligation to ensure that our plans address these issues – now and as well as in the long term.

The argument for accepting this plan as-is, is that if we do nothing, at some point the huge number of preferential rents will increase, making these units unaffordable; rent stabilized apartments will be lost to decontrol; local businesses will be forced out by high rents; and all this will occur without the construction of any new permanent affordable housing. But you cannot expect a neighborhood to accept a rezoning that raises the specter of displacement in the short and medium term by telling the community it is not nearly as bad as what is likely to happen in the longer term. The current plan needs to be sufficiently revamped so that there are more shorter and medium term "plusses" to the community.

To that end, the Council must secure commitments from the Administration to change the plan to better achieve four goals:

- (1) Create significantly more new affordable housing, with more of it at rents the average current Inwood resident can afford;
- (2) Identify and fund programs to allow current tenants to remain in their homes;
- (3) Provide help – including small retail space -- for local businesses to remain in the community; and
- (4) Provide opportunities for local businesses, employment, and cultural resources to maintain Inwood's diversity and local character.

In my recommendation I set out ideas for revamping the plan to help achieve these goals. The highlights of those changes are as follows:

In the area of small business preservation:

First, do not re-zone the Commercial “U” (with the exception of the rezoning area on Broadway beginning at Block 2233, Lot 13 to West 204th Street so that the Library project can proceed). Any rezoning of the remainder of the Commercial U should be delayed until the other rezoning actions have generated 50 percent of the DEIS-projected commercial floor area. During this period, EDC and SBS should be required to develop and fund Inwood- specific programs that work with small businesses and developers of new retail space and provide relocation and financial assistance where necessary.

Second, as part of the effort to help local business remain, include zoning text that would limit store frontages to 40 feet and bank frontages to 25 feet and require a minimum number of stores in certain zoning lots, similar to what was implemented on the Upper West Side. This would help ensure that neighborhood retail space retains the local character of Inwood’s business community, and it would provide space for relocation or return of displaced local businesses. Third, implement the plan I have fought for to relocate the warehouse businesses to the newly proposed M1-4 district in Sherman Creek;

Fourth, make every effort to relocate the automotive repair businesses to a concentrated area in Inwood or the immediately surrounding areas as is being done with the wholesale businesses. If this is not feasible, the City must consider including language in the special district text that would allow automotive repair businesses below residential development wherever practicable;

In the area of new affordable housing:

Use the city-owned lot currently occupied by the DOT at Sherman Creek between 205th and 206th streets for 100 percent affordable housing which would yield about 500 units;

Use the city-owned land located currently occupied by Charter Communications for its service vehicles in the Tip of Manhattan subdistrict, for a 100 percent affordable housing development which could result in another 500 units of affordable housing;

Make every effort to acquire the federally owned site at 5051 Broadway for another 100 percent affordable housing project.

Proceed with the Inwood Library Project and its 175 units of permanently affordable housing by announcing the selection of a “brick and mortar,” centrally-located, and fully-accessible location for an interim library with the same hours and services as the current library;

Make a good faith effort to include the car wash site adjacent to the Inwood Library into the project so that more affordable housing may be created.

Combine Option One under MIH with the Deep Affordability option to require that 20 percent of the residential floor area to be dedicated to housing for residents with incomes averaging 40 percent AMI; this step will make significantly more units affordable to the current average Inwood resident;

In the area of housing preservation:

In addition to funding the Right to Counsel program and including Inwood in the Certificate of No Harassment Program, the plan should include \$7.5 million annually for Inwood-targeted programs, including: additional legal services to ensure that every rent stabilized tenant with a harassment, eviction or preferential rent legal problem has access to counsel; and a tenant organizing and affirmative litigation program to find and address stabilized apartments with unlawfully registered rents.

Provide expense and capital funding for Dyckman Houses, whose residents will be impacted by the rezoning.

Finally, in the area of preservation of historic and cultural resources:

Preserve and commemorate significant historic sites in Inwood including Native American Burial and artifact sites and African slave burial sites; and

Provide art and cultural performance space and artistic workspace to support Inwood’s thriving artistic community.

Without these changes, the plan will offer inadequate protections and benefits to the current residents and businesses of Inwood; making these changes will move the plan significantly toward the goals expressed by residents and business owners my office has heard from over the last two years.