

# Making Growth Work for All New Yorkers

by Annette Bernhardt and Adrienne Shropshire

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While plaNYC is extraordinary in its ambition, it misses a vital opportunity to make New York a truly sustainable city - one that harnesses growth and public investment to generate jobs that pay a living wage and allows everyone to participate in our economy.

The plan will revitalize the city's infrastructure, reduce pollution and build better transportation. It will generate new opportunities for businesses and contractors. And it will require thousands of workers to dig the new parks and tunnels, install energy conserving equipment in buildings, plant green streets to capture storm water, clean up brownfields, and do scores of other heavy lifts.

But unless this vision includes an unerring focus on creating good jobs and training a new generation of skilled workers, the city's future growth will not benefit all communities. Wages have stagnated over the past five years, while the cost of living has shot up 15 percent. Almost one in five New Yorkers, including many who work, lives in poverty. Too often, private developers and large corporations receive generous subsidy and incentive packages but create mostly low-wage jobs, or worse, actually cut jobs over time. And too often, development proceeds behind closed doors, without meaningful community involvement or attention to the public interest.

In a city that grows more and more unequal, we must do a better job of sharing both the prosperity and the burdens that growth brings.

City-sponsored economic development, including the initiatives laid out in plaNYC, can help reverse these trends. For example, tax dollars spent for economic development can be tied to creating decent jobs, with wages, benefits and career ladders that help families thrive. The many environmental initiatives can generate skilled "green-collar" jobs that pay living wages. And the city can strengthen the business community by looking beyond large corporations, to helping manufacturers and small businesses struggling with rising rents.

There is also room for more transparency and accountability to local communities. We should track the number and quality of jobs created to better understand who benefits from the city's investments and who doesn't. We should channel growth to the people and places where opportunity is needed, not only where it is convenient. And we should target new training programs to build opportunity in low-income and immigrant communities.

One of the last stops of the plaNYC 2030 listening tour was Judson Memorial Church in Greenwich Village, where our organizations and 50 other community, labor, and religious groups met with the mayor's staff to discuss the next 25 years. We commend them for the meeting.

But one of the key messages to emerge from that forum needs to be repeated again and again: plaNYC will not meet the challenges of growth unless it directly addresses the need for living wage jobs that can sustain working families.

The mayor ended his Earth Day speech by promising to "swing for the fences." If plaNYC's public investment strategies are linked to commitments to build a new base of good jobs, Bloomberg will indeed have hit the ball out of the park.

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