



THE SOCIETY FOR THE ARCHITECTURE OF THE CITY

East Village/Lower East Side Rezoning: Failure to Regulate the Bowery Corridor **Statement to the City Council, November 7, 2008**

Although this rezoning has been hyped as an action preserving neighborhood character, it provides a great deal of latitude both for new construction and for expansion of existing buildings—even while it limits tower construction and provides some protections for street walls.

A major planning error is the decision to omit the Bowery from the rezoning area. The Bowery is one of our oldest thoroughfares; it appears on the Manus Maps of 1639, but dates back to prehistory as a native American trail, running crooked against the 1811 Manhattan street grid. Still today, much of the Bowery retains a special 19th century character and scale. The Lower East Side grew up around it over the centuries. To map contextual zoning adjacent to the Bowery while leaving the Bowery corridor itself subject to the old, out-dated, standard C6-1 mapping clearly invites new buildings to break the street wall and the skyline with tower-on-a-base construction of the maximum possible height. Examples of such intrusions into the neighborhood have already outraged New Yorkers from the area: the intrusions have also astonished many who use the Williamsburg Bridge, and can hardly believe the inappropriate new buildings they are seeing.

We would like to thank the DCP Environmental Assessment and Review Division for the extensive discussion of historic preservation issues in the EIS—a chilling, 95 page account of the numerous historic properties in the rezoning area, and the negative impacts this rezoning will have on them. Of special concern are the 61 buildings found eligible for local or state protection but not yet landmarked or listed. They are in the path of destruction, because of the latitude for new construction and expansion mentioned above. The City Planning Commission and the Landmarks Preservation Commission seem to need direction here. The agencies are moving in the wrong order: preservation action should precede, not follow, what is in fact a veiled up-zoning paired with a failure to act on the Bowery corridor.

Administration policy was perhaps reflected in the original EIS draft scope, which omitted the Bowery from consideration, in clear violation of CEQR Rules. We urge council members to seek Landmarks Commission action on the unprotected eligible historic properties identified in the FEIS. Further, we believe the Council should require follow up corrective action on the Bowery corridor zoning. Segregating the Bowery from the rest of the Lower East Side make no sense, historically or urbanistically. It is not neighborhood preservation: it is a formula for tearing a neighborhood away from its roots.

Christabel Gough, Secretary
November 7, 2008