

## Frequently Asked Questions:

# MSMX

## Midtown South Mixed-Use Neighborhood Plan

The Midtown South Mixed-Use Plan (MSMX) seeks to foster vibrant, 24/7 mixed-use neighborhoods across 42 blocks of Midtown South by updating decades-old zoning that prohibits new housing. By allowing housing alongside businesses, the plan will help Midtown thrive and give New Yorkers more opportunities to live near everything it has to offer.

Read this guide for answers to some of the most frequently asked questions about the plan.

### LEGALIZING HOUSING IN MIDTOWN SOUTH

#### Why is it important to allow housing in Midtown South?

Midtown South is one of New York City's most centrally located neighborhoods with exceptional access to public transit and jobs. However, outdated zoning from the 1960s needlessly prohibits housing here. This has kept the neighborhood from evolving, even as area businesses face major challenges, and New Yorkers face a historic housing crisis. With vacancy rates citywide at a historic low of 1.4%, updating zoning to allow housing is a commonsense way to address the housing affordability crisis afflicting New Yorkers and create a more vibrant, mixed-use Midtown South — one where people can live closer to jobs and amenities instead of commuting from miles away.

## What parts of Midtown South does this plan focus on? What zoning updates does it make?

The plan focuses on four quadrants of Midtown South with M1-6 manufacturing zoning that prohibits housing. MSMX would replace this outdated, one-size-fits-all zoning with more nuanced and flexible districts that allow housing alongside businesses.

By applying new higher-density R11 and R12 districts with Mandatory Inclusionary Housing, the plan would create 9,700 new homes, including up to 2,900 permanently affordable homes.

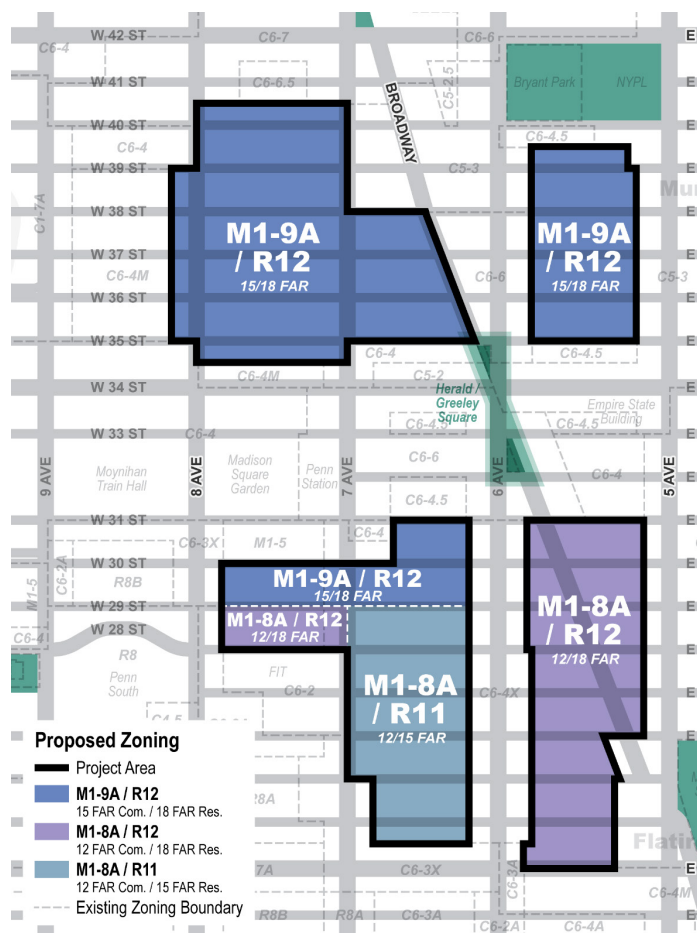
## What are the new R11 and R12 districts in MSMX and why does the plan include them?

The new R11 and R12 districts make sense in Midtown South and will offer New Yorkers far more housing than would otherwise be achievable.

These districts were made possible when New York State repealed its outdated and arbitrary FAR cap in 2024. For decades, the cap had strictly limited the floor area ratio (FAR) of NYC residential buildings to 12. The State lifted this cap after years of advocacy from housing advocates, local elected leaders and City officials, who demonstrated how the cap needlessly blocked housing production and worsened the city's growing housing crisis.

With the cap lifted, the City was able to create R11 and R12 districts — allowing FARs of 15 and 18 — and include them in MSMX.

Midtown South is an ideal place for these districts, thanks to its central location, existing density, and excellent access to public transit, jobs, and amenities. The area already has large commercial buildings that far exceed the residential densities proposed by MSMX, so new housing will not feel out of scale. Moreover, because the new R11 and R12 districts include Mandatory Inclusionary Housing, they will provide a major source of permanently affordable, income-restricted housing in a neighborhood that currently offers little to none.



Map showing proposed zoning

## AFFORDABILITY

### How much affordable housing does current zoning permit compared to MSMX?

Except for a small sliver, current zoning doesn't allow any housing — let alone income-restricted, affordable housing. **MSMX would change course by requiring affordable housing in every new residential development through Mandatory Inclusionary Housing (MIH).** This would be the first time that MIH is applied in Midtown Manhattan, and over the next 10 years, it would deliver 2,900 permanently affordable homes — enough to house 4,500 New Yorkers.

MIH requires new apartment buildings or residential conversions to include permanently income-restricted homes. The program includes three affordability options. Depending on the option, these homes serve families making

from 40% to 80% of the area median income (AMI). At least half of these homes must be two-bedrooms or larger, and all must be evenly spread throughout each building. This will help ensure diverse and inclusive housing in the heart of the city.

## Does MSMX force out existing residents?

No, the Midtown South plan doesn't require anyone to move — it just allows new housing to be added, primarily on vacant or underused sites. Today, the area has relatively few homes (only about 2,300), and a much lower population density that surrounding neighborhoods and the city as a whole. Many of these homes are protected by the Loft Law and other rent stabilization laws. By creating new housing and converting empty office space, the plan helps reduce pressure on existing tenants while expanding housing opportunity in a central part of the city.



38th Street looking west from Fifth Avenue

## CONTEXT, CHARACTER, HEIGHT

### How would new apartment buildings fit in Midtown South?

New apartment buildings would fit well!

Midtown South already has many large, tall buildings — especially early 20th-century loft buildings — that are denser than anything proposed under MSMX. For example, some existing buildings have floor area ratios (FAR) of 33, nearly double the maximum 18 FAR allowed under the plan.

MSMX also includes thoughtful design rules that promote loft-like architecture, with street walls and base heights that match surrounding buildings. These design standards will ensure that new housing complements existing character and create consistent, pedestrian-friendly streetscapes.

### Should the plan include height limits to prevent out-of-context supertalls?

Height limits would be unnecessary, and likely, counterproductive.

First, MSMX won't encourage ultra-tall, narrow towers. New buildings would almost certainly take advantage of the 485-x tax benefit, which only applies to rental buildings. These buildings tend to have lower ceilings and fewer high-priced upper-floor units than super-tall condo towers.

Mandatory Inclusionary Housing also requires that affordable units be spread across at least 65% of the building, further discouraging expensive, super-tall buildings.

At the same time, imposing strict height limits alongside the MIH requirement for permanently affordable housing could discourage housing construction altogether, driving it into adjacent areas where neither rule is in effect.

## Will allowing housing lead to lots of building demolitions?

Not likely. Most development is expected to come from underused sites or conversions. Many buildings in the area already have higher densities than is what allowed today or proposed under the MSMX plan, which strongly disincentivizes redevelopment. Moreover, many buildings are protected by rent stabilization or landmark rules. Finally, even if feasible, demolitions are very expensive and complex to carry out, especially in a city like New York. City of Yes for Housing Opportunity made residential conversions easier, making it more likely for existing buildings to be adapted for a new use.

## Why does the Midtown South Plan allow high-density on midblock areas?

Unlike many neighborhoods, Midtown South doesn't follow the pattern of dense avenues and less-dense mid-blocks. Many Midtown South zoning districts span entire blocks and buildings have high densities throughout. In fact, mid-block buildings often match or exceed the size of those on avenues. The plan reflects this reality, with zoning that matches the existing built environment and supports vibrant, walkable, mixed-use neighborhoods.

## Could we reduce as-of-right density in the Southeast Quadrant and still create enough housing through other means?

The southeast quadrant is actually one of the best-positioned areas to add new housing, having benefited from ongoing investments and being located close to transit, Madison Square Park and everyday amenities.

Reducing density here from R12 to R10, as some have proposed, would mean 55% less housing; in other words, 1,700 fewer homes for New Yorkers. Relying on optional zoning tools like the transfer of landmark development rights simply cannot make up for that loss.

As New York City confronts a historic housing crisis, R11 and R12 districts offer the best, most reliable way to deliver urgently needed homes in one of the city's most desirable neighborhoods.



*Broadway looking south from 32nd Street*

## CHANGE AND CONTINUITY

### How does the MSMX plan balance adding housing and preserving commercial activity?

The MSMX plan encourages diverse, mixed-use neighborhoods by allowing homes and businesses to thrive alongside each other, as they do in adjacent areas. Specifically, the plan increases non-residential density to 15 FAR in the densest portions of the plan area and maintains the existing 12 FAR in the lower density areas —ensuring room for business growth while delivering much-needed housing. This creates a win-win: more housing options for New Yorkers, and more growth opportunities and foot traffic for businesses.

## Will the MSMX plan drive out garment manufacturers?

The plan wouldn't drive out garment and fashion businesses. They are allowed today and will continue to be allowed with MSMX.

Past zoning efforts aimed to preferentially protect manufacturing at the expense of other uses. Unfortunately, these provisions did not prevent the significant decline of the garment industry in the northwest area. At the same time, restrictive single-use zoning had unintended consequences, including increased vacancies and non-conformances as manufacturing declined without allowing for other uses. MSMX offers a more flexible approach that encourages live-work spaces, supports active streets, and makes the area more attractive for business growth and talent recruitment.

Beyond zoning, the City has a robust program to support the garment and fashion sector in Midtown South. The City will continue to vigorously explore data-informed, non-zoning programs and policies to support these industries as the MSMX plan advances through public review.

## What will happen to large office buildings in the area?

By and large, large office buildings will remain in place as offices or be converted into housing. Many were built before 1961 and already exceed the densities proposed by MSMX, making full redevelopment unlikely. Research shows that demolition is only financially viable when a new building can be at least three times larger than the existing one, an unlikely scenario here. In addition, demolishing large buildings in dense neighborhoods like Midtown is costly and complicated. That's why many of these buildings are prime candidates for residential conversion, especially since the recently-approved City of Yes zoning updates have cleared the path for such conversions.

## LANDMARKS AND HISTORIC DISTRICTS

### Does the MSMX plan anticipate demolishing buildings in the historic districts?

No. Landmark buildings and those in historic districts are protected and reviewed by the Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC). The plan is designed to support adaptive reuse of landmarked buildings, not tear them down.

We're working closely with LPC to ensure the plan complements preservation goals while allowing for residential conversions where appropriate. State law caps residential density in historic districts at 12 FAR. This would be the case even with MSMX.

### How does the plan support Midtown South's historic landmarks?

City of Yes made it easier for individual landmarks across the city to sell unused development rights by streamlining the process and expanding the number of eligible receiving sites. MSMX builds on that by giving landmarks more rights to transfer and creating more viable transfer opportunities. Together, these changes both support historic preservation and unlock new housing.

### Will the additional residential density allowed by MSMX make landmark development rights 'worth less' and harder for landmarks to transfer?

No. Giving landmarks more floor area to transfer and more places to transfer it to will make it easier, not harder, for them to sell their development rights. At the same time, limits are in place on how much receiving sites can accept to ensure new developments are reasonably scaled. Ultimately, landmark transfers are a valuable but carefully limited tool to add housing and generate urgently-needed funds for landmark repairs, maintenance and operations.