



**Testimony by Dennis M. Walcott, President and CEO of Queens Public Library  
New York City Council Subcommittee on Zoning and Franchises  
September 9, 2025**

Good morning, Chair Riley, Speaker Adams, Council Member Dr. Williams and the members of this esteemed committee. I am Dennis M. Walcott, President and CEO of Queens Public Library (QPL, Library). Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

Queens Public Library is the trusted center of the community, and everyone can find the help they need at the library, regardless of their background or circumstances. Our Central Library is located in the heart of Jamaica on Merrick Boulevard, where in FY25 more than 710,000 visitors walked through its doors, circulation was over 728,000, and we saw nearly 116,000 computer sessions and nearly 67,000 Wi-Fi sessions. The 234,000 square-foot Central Library consists of our Children’s Library Discovery Center, a dedicated Teen Center, a computer center, the Archives, an auditorium, and robust library collections. It offers specialized services like our Job and Business Academy, New Americans Program and Adult Learning Program.

More than 550 staff members work out of the Central Library building. In addition to its public spaces, the building houses QPL’s administrative headquarters and base of operations, including core departments such as Information Technology, Capital Projects, Facilities, Security, Programs and Services, and Human Resources, which support Central and 65 other locations throughout Queens. The site also has a small loading dock where our Shipping department transports library materials, technology and equipment, and stations QPL vehicles. These departments are vital to our daily functions systemwide, allowing us to welcome 6.6 million visits, circulate 10.9 million items, offer 55,000 programs, and have 2.7 million Wi-Fi and 982,000 computer sessions last fiscal year.

Since 2000, the population surrounding Central Library has jumped by 25 percent, and the community continues to grow. We see this with the newly completed Ruby Square, a 50,000 square-foot housing development neighboring us on 90th Avenue. City Planning anticipates the rezoning will create up to 12,000 new housing units, increasing the local population even more.

The reality is the Central Library building, opened in its current location in 1966, is dated, rapidly aging, and too small to adequately serve the extensive and evolving needs of the community and our locations throughout Queens. Our critical infrastructure is struggling, and the public and staff floors need to be expanded and upgraded to meet current and future demands. We are thankful to our staff who go above and beyond in delivering high-quality and innovative service to our users and ensure our operations run efficiently; however, we are constrained by the physical limitations of our building.

In order to effectively serve the neighborhood and the borough well into the future, Central Library needs to be expanded and modernized. A vertical expansion of 50,000 square-feet and comprehensive renovation of the entire facility – both public and staff spaces – will enhance the



experience for patrons and improve critical systemwide logistics and operational support. According to calculations, the project estimates currently average \$168 million.

The Jamaica Neighborhood Plan is building a future for the region to thrive. Strong public libraries mean strong communities. **Investment in the expansion and renovation of Queens Public Library’s Central Library – an institution where current and future residents can access trusted resources, inspiring spaces, and countless opportunities – is an investment in the vibrancy and success of Jamaica and our borough for generations to come.**

Thank you, Chair Riley and Council Members.

**New York City Council, Subcommittee on Zoning and Franchise (Sept 9, 2025 Public Hearing)  
Zoning, Jamaica Neighborhood Plan, Queens (C 250712 ZMQ; 250173 ZMQ ; C250171 HAQ)**

**Commenter:** Emily Verla Bovino, PhD, Coordinator of the Art History program at York College of the City University of New York (CUNY) in Jamaica, Queens.

I joined the York faculty in 2023; however, in this testimony, I represent myself, not the college. Though I participated in Steering Committee Meetings for the Jamaica Neighborhood Plan, I preferred not to express support or opposition at the City Planning Commission Public Hearing on July 2, 2025; to comment online, however, I was required to give a position, so I opposed the plan due to concerns about the planning process, lack of attention to legacies of redlining, affordability and environmental justice issues. The concerns still stand.

If the plan is going forward, it must rigorously implement the task force requested by councilmember Nantasha Williams. Rezoning has caused displacement across New York City. Furthermore, I am concerned about the impact it may have on historically significant public art not being cared for by the City, State and Federal governments that funded it: in 1989, the New York Times described Jamaica as “a center for work by black artists” as a result of public art commissioned through the General Services Administration and the Dormitory Authority of the State of New York. The public sector, however, has done little to ensure care for this art as a resource for the neighborhood.

York College’s campus, for example, is a museum-in-school created with New York State funds from the campus construction budget. Its public art features artists selected by a Community Art Committee in 1984. Black artists of renown like Elizabeth Catlett, Houston Conwill, Sam Gilliam, Richard Hunt and Martin Puryear (images attached, pp. 2-15) dedicated years to their site-responsive projects out of commitment to Southeast Queens’ diverse communities. To date, care, conservation and interest in the role York’s public art can play in Jamaica’s thriving has been neglected by planners and elected representatives alike. **Let’s take care of what we have and build from it.**

York’s Art History program stewards York’s public art and works with artists of the Southeast Queens Artist Alliance to prepare students for arts leadership in Southeast Queens (images attached, pp. 16-28). Implementation of the Jamaica plan must involve outreach with SeQAA artists and York students pursued with more diligence through meetings designed for them. York College’s Master Plan can contribute to addressing open space issues and studio/exhibition availability issues. The York Faculty Caucus voted to support an agroforestry project that continues to seek the York administration’s official permission. The college’s Southeast Queens Biennial and Residency Program need funding. On 160th Street, the concrete under and around Houston Conwill’s Arc (1986) is deteriorating. Capital grants can contribute to restoration while

encouraging more programming around it. A collaborative project between York and SUNY Buffalo (images attached, pp. 29-39) shows the way art can assist in mitigating air quality issues in the Liberty Avenue area that will worsen with upzoning. Capital grants can support their realization. Art can be involved in improving the urban fabric through artist techniques in public engagement, not just murals and performances.

In 1971, artist-activist, and Jamaica resident, Tom Lloyd – who will have a major retrospective this fall at the Studio Museum in Harlem – conducted a Community Artist Cultural Survey with York students across Jamaica to conceive the Store Front Museum (image attached, p. 1). The first museum in Queens, a museum of African-American art, history and culture, it served Jamaica out of a former tire shop for fifteen years with 47 exhibitions and 250 performances. Yet, rather than bring different visions of the future together, the City facilitated unnecessary displacement of one by the other, evicting the Store Front Museum for the York College gym. It's my hope that, as rezoning goes forward, it can produce a new model for art and urban planning – a model for a just redistributive city that values Jamaica's history and its art as its vision.



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**New York City Council  
Subcommittee on Zoning and Franchises  
Honorable Kevin Riley, Chair**

**Testimony of YMCA of Greater New York  
Submitted by Cedric Dew, Vice President for Transitional Housing  
& Executive Director, Jamaica YMCA**

**Public Hearing to Review Several Land Use Applications, including Jamaica Neighborhood  
Plan  
September 9, 2025**

I respectfully submit the following testimony on behalf of the YMCA of Greater New York.

The YMCA of Greater New York is committed to empowering youth, improving health, and strengthening community. With 24 YMCA branches and more than 100 community sites across New York City, the Y is among the city's largest providers of human services spanning from infancy to older adult — and an important anchor, convener, and catalyst for transformational change in underserved communities.

Within the community of Jamaica, the YMCA has owned the property at 89-25 Parsons Boulevard since 1922. Formerly known as the Central Queens YMCA, the Jamaica YMCA opened to the public in 1928. The Jamaica Y provides free youth programming, fitness courses and aquatics for all ages, and housing for different client populations.

The YMCA is pleased to learn that the Jamaica Neighborhood Plan (JNP) includes up to 11,759 new homes, including 2,984 income restricted affordable homes. 2020 Census data available through the NYC Population FactFinder shows that Jamaica Neighborhood Tabulation Area, which largely coincides with the area being rezoned, has high rates of crowded homes, both owner-occupied (26.9% of households have 5 or more people, compared to 14.1% in New York City as a whole) and renter-occupied (19.6% of households have 5 or more people, compared to 10.7% citywide).

YMCA OF GREATER NEW YORK 5 West 63<sup>rd</sup> Street, 7<sup>th</sup> Floor New York, New York 10023  
D 212-630-9600 W ymcanyc.org

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As a provider of transitional housing services in the area included in the JNP, we strive to offer services that stabilize families and households. More affordable housing options, such as deeply affordable and senior housing, in the community will complement the Y's effort to support New Yorkers and strengthen communities.

On a broader scale, as a service provider with nearly 100 years of experience in the Jamaica community, the YMCA understands the needs of community members and as such supports a plan that goes beyond the creation of affordable housing to consider job training, commercial space, infrastructure investments, improved transit access, schools, libraries, open spaces and community spaces. We appreciate that City leaders are taking the time needed to hear community voices and come up with a plan that meets the needs of this community. We believe that community members are likely to benefit from a holistic plan that creates affordable housing while also addressing its impact on other areas of life.

The YMCA appreciates the opportunity to provide feedback and is thankful for your leadership in investing in the Jamaica community. The JPN has been years in the making and as a stakeholder in the Jamaica community, the YMCA looks forward to the positive outcomes such as the creation of stable housing, safe space for children to learn and play in, seniors are cared for, infrastructure works reliably, and community organizations are equipped to lead the way in shaping the neighborhood's future.

If you have any questions, please contact me at [cdew@ymcanyc.org](mailto:cdew@ymcanyc.org) or Sharon Levy, SVP of Public Affairs at the YMCA of Greater New York at [slevy@ymcanyc.org](mailto:slevy@ymcanyc.org).



Department of Urban Studies

Natalie Bump Vena  
Assistant Professor

September 12, 2025

I am testifying against the Jamaica Neighborhood Plan because it would accelerate gentrification, while failing to provide enough units of real affordable housing for the neighborhood's Black and brown residents. Designed to entice real estate development, this plan is a bad deal for Jamaica residents.

The Jamaica rezoning's boosters misleadingly assert that its provisions for mandatory inclusionary housing would prevent residential displacement. Queens Borough President Donovan Richards and Dan Garodnick, Director of the Department of City Planning and Chair of the City Planning Commission, have said in public hearings that the rezoning would create 4,000 income restricted units. However, the draft environmental impact statement gives different figures, stating "approximately 2,500-3,744" such units would be built (ES-1). This range reflects the four different MIH options that city council could apply. The highest affordable percentage would be available under MIH Option 2—at 30% of floor area. This undesirable choice would create apartments for relatively higher-income households (an average income of 80% AMI in affordable units). The Jamaica rezoning, however, would likely produce less than 3,744 units: during the Queens Borough President's public hearing, Richards repeatedly advocated for MIH Option 1, reserving 25% of floor area for income-restricted apartments.

Option 1 would fail to create enough affordable units for Jamaica residents. Only 10% of floor area would be set aside for residents making 40% of AMI. In 2025, 40% of AMI for a family of four in New York City is \$64,800. It is \$45,360 for a single person. According to the American Community Survey (2019-2023), the Jamaica neighborhood's median household income is \$59,944. The percentage of households making under \$50,000 is 41.2%, indicating that 10% of floor area is woefully inadequate in a community where new, luxury development would continue to fuel rising rents, eradicating any affordable market-rate units left in the neighborhood.

Moreover, since the [2024 Noel settlement](#) rolled back community preference,<sup>1</sup> Jamaica residents would only have access to 600-800 apartments (15% to 20% of affordable units) under Garodnick and Richards’s high estimate. HPD also plans to develop 34 apartments for affordable homeownership and 83 affordable rental units on city-owned property. Again, under the *Noel* settlement, that is a piddly 5-7 affordable homes and 12-16 affordable rentals for Jamaica residents.

Finally, the plan would downzone wide swaths of Jamaica from M1 to M2 and M3 Districts, imperiling communities already struggling with pollution from cement mixing factories and waste transfer stations. The region is now emblematic of environmental racism, and the rezoning would further enable heavy industry to locate right next to residential homes. This is an unacceptable outcome for a plan that aims to “create a climate-resilient and environmentally just Jamaica,” according to DCP’s March 2025 booklet for the Jamaica Neighborhood Plan.

I welcome you to contact me at [natalie.vena@qc.cuny.edu](mailto:natalie.vena@qc.cuny.edu) to discuss any aspect of my comments.

Sincerely,

Natalie Bump Vena, J.D., Ph.D.

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<sup>1</sup> Chris Janaro, “Community Preferences Curtailed: City’s Affordable Housing Lotteries Face Changing Dynamics,” *City Limits*, January 26, 2024, <https://citylimits.org/community-preferences-curtailed-citys-affordable-housing-lotteries-face-changing-dynamics/>