Site Q&A 2/8/2022

Answered by Angie Co

**How many people need housing in the SoHo area?**

* First, a brief definition of what “affordable housing” means in the US. Rental housing is considered affordable if it constitutes 30% or less of a household’s income. The federal government sets the Area Median Income for NYC each year, and you can read about this on the NYC government website: [https://www1.nyc.gov/site/hpd/services-and-information/do-you-qualify.page#:~:text=Housing%20is%20considered%20affordable%20if,for%20each%20affordable%20housing%20opportunity.](https://www1.nyc.gov/site/hpd/services-and-information/do-you-qualify.page%23:~:text=Housing%20is%20considered%20affordable%20if,for%20each%20affordable%20housing%20opportunity.)
* NYC is experiencing an acute affordable housing shortage. A good analysis of the crisis was done in 2018 by the NYC Comptroller, and a link to the report summary is below. Since 2009, the city gained over 500,000 new residents. Waged for NYC renters stagnated over the last 20 years, while during that time, the average monthly rent increased by almost 40%. The report finds that 580,000 New Yorkers need affordable housing, and 89% of them are extremely or very low income. <https://comptroller.nyc.gov/reports/nyc-for-all-the-housing-we-need/?utm_source=Media-All&utm_campaign=cd0b03da3f-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2017_05_31_COPY_01&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_7cd514b03e-cd0b03da3f-141571729>
* City officials estimate that the SoHo/NoHo rezoning will create about 3,000 new residential units, of which up to 900 will be deemed affordable. The majority will be market rate. This is the main part of the issue: the city government does not develop affordable housing on its own, it does so by mandating or incentivizing the private sector to create affordable housing. This recent [article](https://citylimits.org/2021/12/20/newly-approved-soho-rezoning-promises-affordable-homes-how-much-will-they-really-cost/#:~:text=Buildings%20and%20apartments%20in%20SoHo.&text=Under%20MIH%2C%20developers%20constructing%20residential,%2D%20and%20middle%2Dincome%20renters.) on the SoHo rezoning lays out a number of the issues, as does [this one from last year](https://gothamist.com/news/7-things-you-ought-know-about-sohonoho-rezoning), which explains some of the different perspectives on the rezoning.

**Who are they besides the artists?**

* Everyone in NYC should have access to affordable housing, but there is a real need to create housing for the most vulnerable city residents who also have the greatest economic need—people who are homeless, or are extremely or very low income. Some of these people are artists, but others aren’t.
* Artists began occupying old manufacturing buildings in SOHO starting in the 1950s, leading to a transformation of the area from an abandoned industrial area to a thriving and experimental arts district. In 1971, NYC changed the zoning in SoHo to allow artists to legally live in the area—under the idea that artists are a form of manufacturing—but it was not until this rezoning passed in December 2021 that residential became an as-of-right use in the area. Now, people other than certified artist (and LOFT law tenants—another form of illegal residential use that was partially legalized) are allowed to live in SoHo.
* I taught a studio course on SOHO last year, and the project by [JAMES SOPER, ZARAH DURST & ZOE QUINONES](https://sites.google.com/g.syr.edu/syracuse-arch-nyc-2021sp/home?authuser=1#h.dj5cvadt563c) focuses on the issue of homelessness and affordable housing, and what might happen in SOHO to address the affordable housing crisis.

**What are the basic regulations and required preservation rules for the historic core and the historic corridor?**

* Owners of a New York City landmark or a building located within a designated New York City historic district must receive a permit from the Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC) before performing any type of work.
* This NYC government website has interactive maps where you can see and find information on landmarked buildings and districts: <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/lpc/designations/maps.page>
* Generally, for a historic building, LPC requires that a property owner will have to keep the outward appearance of the building preserved. Changes to the interior of the building are more allowed, depending on what aspects of the building are noted for historic value. Any addition must undergo review to ensure it is suitable.
* While it is helpful to understand what LPC does and how it works, I encourage all of you to consider what preservation means in an evolving neighborhood. Who decides what is remembered and preserved? What is important and culturally significant? In my presentation on the history of SOHO that I gave yesterday, I tried to share aspects of history that are not as remembered or as alluring as the one of avant-garde artists. In the studio I taught last year on SOHO, a project by [AQILA BAKRI, ELLIE DERWENSKUS & PROTIK CHOUDHURI](https://sites.google.com/g.syr.edu/syracuse-arch-nyc-2021sp/home?authuser=1#h.cc4puvmaayse) looked specifically at questions of preservation and came up with a very fascinating proposal for SOHO that included the continuation of a live artist culture.