



## OFFICE OF THE MAYOR

### MIKE SPANO

June 9, 2023

Jeannette Garcia  
Nicole Waite  
Co-Spokespersons  
United Yonkers

Dear Ms. Garcia and Ms. Waite,

Thank you for your thoughtful letter of June 7 regarding development in the City of Yonkers. As always, I welcome input from all of our neighborhood organizations and community volunteers. You are a key ingredient in improving communication between City Government and the people we serve, and I truly appreciate your time and involvement.

Cities are always changing, and Yonkers is no different. Change always brings challenges, and we are no different in that regard either. Consequently I will be pleased to facilitate a meeting to discuss the issues you raise and see how we can best adhere to a path that benefits all of the people of the City. Without responding to all of the many points you raise, since we will be discussing them, I do want to let you know my thoughts on some of the more significant ones.

You said, for example, that over-scale buildings have diminished access to the Hudson River and eliminated crucial greenspace. Actually just the opposite has occurred. The new buildings along the waterfront, for example, were built on former industrial brownfields that were inaccessible to the public. Now each building contains a public waterfront promenade, opening up the waterfront to the public for the first time in living memory. The Sawyer Place building in Larkin Plaza results from the elimination of an unsightly parking lot and its replacement with the uncovering of the Saw Mill River. A shadow study of Van Der Donck Park and Philipse Manor Hall was conducted as part of the environmental review process prior to construction of Sawyer Place. As the thriving plant and animal life indicates, there was no negative environmental effect.

The proposed AMS development of Chicken Island will allow for the next phase of the Saw Mill River Daylighting Program, along with other open space accessible to the public. Just a month ago, on upper Warburton Avenue, we opened the new Ginsburg Park that was part of the plan that allowed construction of a new apartment house. Similarly, the Downing Street project in the Ludlow area will contain new public waterfront space and a renovated City park. If you have not been to all of these

locations recently I invite you do so you, because this administration has opened a record amount of new public space and parks.

You stated that these developments strain our schools. In reality, our school population has dropped in the past few years, and a demographic study conducted recently by the school district indicates we have ample capacity. Our schools are old and many need replacement or upgrading, but that is not the same as saying they are strained by new development.

You said development reduces sustainability. Yonkers has done much to reduce its carbon footprint in recent years, and the reality is that multifamily buildings such as those under construction are many times more energy efficient than single family homes.

At a time when the tri-state area experiences an unprecedented housing shortage, we cannot meet the housing needs of people by building just more single family and low rises. In addition, if we did so, we would be building the most unsustainable housing you can find. We must consider an appropriate mix of housing styles, and I certainly welcome a discussion as to how we obtain that balance.

I do share your concern that most of the new development consists of rentals rather than ownership units. We have had many discussions regarding that point, and we learned that banks and other financing institutions are not prepared to finance condominium construction. We are looking at other ways to encourage home ownership, but have limited ability to overcome a business model that prevails throughout the region. If we were to say to an investor that they must build ownership units, then they will go elsewhere and build no new housing at all in Yonkers.

We have built, or permitted, more than 12,000 new units of housing in Yonkers during the past eleven years. The majority of that number has been concentrated in former industrial sites near or on the waterfront. Twenty-two percent of those units are reserved as affordable housing for people making less than the average area income. Less than five existing units had to be emptied in order to make way for the 12,000 new ones. I often hear people express concern that poorer people are being forced to leave in order to make way for the new arrivals. I would be concerned if that was the case. Fortunately, it is not.

I look forward to discussing your proposed core principles, many of which I do believe we are doing our best to achieve. Of course, we can always improve.

I certainly agree that community input is essential. I point to the recent rezoning of the Ludlow area as an example of how that can work. We had a year-long environmental review process with multiple neighborhood meetings. As a result, the rezoning was fully supported on the record by the area community association.

Similarly, the recent rezoning of Chicken Island resulted from an environmental review process that lasted more than two years, and again contained multiple public hearings and community meetings. I hope no one feels that they did not have a chance to participate, because we did our best to make sure that they did.



With regard to the Zoning and Planning Boards, I do note that although we appoint the members of these boards, the standards the boards must adhere to are set out in state law. The Zoning Board, for example, is required to adhere to a five-part test when considering a variance. State law would not allow the City to impose its own regulations that override the state code.

We are in a difficult time. The Governor has indicated our area needs thousands of new housing units in order to meet the demand. I hear so many desperate stories of young people who cannot afford to live in the area they were raised, or of senior citizens who cannot afford to stay in the neighborhood where they have lifelong connections. Meanwhile, as the Governor has also said, wherever you go people say they do not want any new development.

It is a conundrum, and one that I do hope we can address by working together.

I do note that you have scheduled a press conference and released your letter to the public without waiting for my response. In order to reassure those who might therefore view this process as a political one rather than a non-partisan exercise in civic discourse, perhaps you might also distribute this response letter along with your own materials.

Please contact Bianca Abraham in my office at 914-377-6300 to arrange a mutually convenient time for us to get together.

Very truly yours,



MIKE SPANO

Mayor

cc: Honorable Members of the City Council  
Armour Villa Neighborhood Association  
Downtown Quality of Life Committee  
Hudson River Community Association  
Hyatt Community Association of Southeast Yonkers  
Lake Avenue Community Association  
Ludlow Park Residents Association  
Park Hill Residents Association  
River Communities Coalition of Yonkers  
Rockledge Neighbors Sunset Green Tenants Association  
Van Cortlandt Crest Association  
Yonkers Committee for Smart Development