

AIA New York 2026 Policy Platform

American Institute of Architects New York Chapter (AIANY) is thrilled to present our 2026 Policy Platform for New York. AIANY represents over 5,000 architects and design professionals committed to positively impacting the physical and social qualities of our city. The purpose of this document is to share an overview of the top policy priorities of the architecture and design community for the coming year and present recommendations to improve the built environment. Our attention in 2026 will be set on housing, sustainability, public realm, transportation and infrastructure, and procurement policy. New York is facing crises like never before with affordable housing being out of reach for many New Yorkers, more frequent extreme weather events, and an uncoordinated use of public space. This document presents a number of recommendations to remedy these persistent challenges for New Yorkers and details opportunities to take legislative action.

Housing

City

- Ensure quality sustainable design practices are prioritized and implement efficiency focused mechanisms to enable robust housing development, relieving key administrative burdens
- Unlock tools to develop on small lots with building and zoning code amendments, adding flexibility for multifamily development
- Maximize investment in the future value today by planning for housing development around the forthcoming Interborough Express, and amend zoning code to allow transit-oriented development around future transit stations, as initially proposed in City of Yes for Housing Opportunity
- Promote adaptive reuse with tools for office to residential conversions and robust design guidelines, financial tools, and technical support

State

- Support opportunities to develop small lots with tax incentives to support the cost of acquiring land and getting projects to pencil out
- Ease administrative burden and complexity in defining project requirements by removing or modifying outdated requirements and definitions in the Multiple Dwelling Law and removing requirements in conflict with or redundant to other state and local requirements
- Establish financial tools to enable green affordable housing projects to pencil out
- Reform SEQR to streamline process of building sustainable housing by cutting red tape that adds onerous time and cost to projects

Sustainability & Resilience

City

- Invest in citywide resiliency measures and coastal resiliency to protect at-risk communities from extreme weather events and increased global warming impacts
- Establish strong City Hall leadership to oversee building decarbonization and establish a Mayoral Taskforce on Affordable Building Decarbonization

- Promote the use of low-carbon construction materials; standardize reporting for a public citywide central database on whole building embodied carbon intensity and establish environmental product declaration requirements with global warming potential thresholds for common construction materials
- Provide density bonuses for projects meeting low embodied carbon building standards and expand existing green density incentives to promote sustainable development
- Amend Local Law 97 to enable flexibility for strategic building decarbonization and bolster Local Law 97 offset programs supporting energy efficiency retrofits for affordable housing
- Create a citywide map of grid capacity and infrastructure needs and improve data transparency on energy efficiency to support quantifying retrofit paybacks
- Establish Circular Design and Construction Guidelines for all capital agencies and build out the physical and digital infrastructure to support material reuse

State

- Incentivize the use of low carbon construction materials via financial tools, such as sales tax exemptions, EPD grant programs, and an expansion of PACE eligibility
- Establish embodied carbon reduction challenge operated by NYSERDA, modeled off of Massachusetts Clean Energy Center's first in the nation Embodied Carbon Reduction Challenge, to demonstrate low-cost, high-impact strategies to reduce embodied carbon
- Establish a long-term strategy to reduce embodied carbon in public and private building projects by setting three compliance pathways in the Building Code for embodied carbon reduction

Procurement & Delivery

City

- Ensure design professionals are paid fair wages that reflect the value of architecture, and the scope/scale of work involved in quality public projects
- Amend city procurement rules to follow Best Value Procurement in lieu of lowest first cost (low bid) awards for design and construction
- Ensure firm size definitions in RFPs reflect AIA definition, particularly for small firms
- Improve MBE and small firm access and engagement in public work/contracts
- Streamline and reform capital project delivery processes with a coordinated, strategic citywide approach to build smarter and cut out waste
- Establish a City-Industry Capital Process Reform Taskforce to identify and remove barriers across planning, budgeting, procurement, permitting, and delivery, leveraging the expertise of those who design and build New York

State

- Improve quality and enable innovation for public projects by supporting agencies and authorities exploring alternative delivery tools such as progressive design build, construction manager build, and construction manager as constructor; expand the use of alternative delivery for more project types to provide flexibility so the procurement method fits the project's goals
- Eliminate low bid procurement for capital projects and use quality-based selection (QBS) for design and construction

Transportation and Infrastructure

City

- Develop flexible curb use management strategies and regulations; adopt street design guidelines that balance goods movement with other street activities and facilitate deliveries by microdelivery modes such as cargo bikes; invest in Blue Highway infrastructure
- Set more rigorous urban design streetscape regulations for industrial and mixed-use districts; require off street loading with limited curb cuts and screening at large freight distribution facilities
- Support a less car-centric city by investing in a citywide greenway network, comprehensive bike network and expanding the bus system and frequency
- Establish an indirect source rule and amend zoning to allow last mile facilities as of right to positively improve freight and mobility that protects neighborhood

State

- Assure funding for ongoing state-of-good repairs for local transportation infrastructure to maintain and protect critical assets
- Secure full funding for critical transportation projects during the planning, design, or construction phases—specifically, the Interborough Express and Second Avenue Subway Phase Two

Public Realm

City

- Fund public spaces like the City funds public infrastructure to ensure that these spaces can be designed and activated to be both functional and resilient; allocate this investment to existing spaces to ensure they can be useable, maintained, and feel safe
- Create a citywide Public Realm Plan that includes an evaluation of current infrastructure and neighborhood disparities; makes the connection between maintenance, activation, and creation; expands the scope of what is considered the public realm; reimagine the use of curb and corner space; and explore community centered initiatives, such as the expansion of outdoor dining and creation of pedestrian-friendly spaces
- Employ creative value-capture mechanisms to fund public realm projects; explore alternative funding mechanisms via trash and parking to fund DSNY, DOT, and SBS projects
- Ensure strong leadership and oversight over public realm; increase support/budget/staff for the Chief Public Realm Officer and maintain role in future mayoral administrations

Other

- Amend plumbing code to enable the design of multi-stall all-gender bathrooms as of right and establish design standards

For more information about AIANY's Policy Platform, please contact Bria Donohue, Director of Government Affairs at bdonohue@aiany.org.