

To: City Planning Commission

From: Metin Sarci, Co-Chair, Housing, Land Use, and Zoning Committee |
Manhattan Community Board 9

Date: April 1, 2026

Subject: Comments and Recommendations for the Affordable Housing Fast Track Methodology

I. Proposed Methodology Comment Summary

The City Planning Commission's (CPC) proposed methodology for the Affordable Housing Fast Track creates a technocratic vacuum that ignores the qualitative realities of housing production in individual neighborhoods like West Harlem. By relying exclusively on administrative milestones such as the "Start Date" and Department of Buildings (DOB) permit issuance, the rules establish a production metric that does not guarantee actual housing delivery.

This approach overlooks critical institutional gaps that Community Boards (CBs) are uniquely positioned to remediate. As noted in the J. Max Bond Center Assessment, these new Charter-mandated pathways represent a significant shift in leverage, where condensed reviews reduce the efficacy of CB recommendations. Without integrating CBs as active risk mitigators, the City risks approving projects that are mathematically "started" but practically stalled due to infrastructure deficits or site-specific constraints.

II. Community Boards as Strategic Partners

The CPC should move beyond a purely mathematical formula and codify Community Board involvement as a "milestone" in the methodology. CBs can serve as the essential bridge between high-level agency data and ground-level reality.

Under Section 197-f, the CPC must find adequacy of existing infrastructure. Community Boards may support this mandate by serving as the data-validator for capacity study. This ensures that findings are based on granular, site-specific data rather than lagging citywide datasets. This partnership allows for a more accurate assessment of whether a district is truly "low production" or simply constrained by physical infrastructure.

Early Risk Identification (HPD Support)

CBs should be involved as early as the RFP process. Early participation allows for the remediation of infrastructure concerns, such as local sewer capacity or school seat shortages; before a project reaches the "closed record" stage. This ensures project proposals align with district needs (30% AMI) rather than luxury-adjacent units (80–130% AMI) that would otherwise cannibalize production metrics.

Data Validation (CPC Support)

Under Section 197-f, the CPC must find adequacy of existing infrastructure. CB9 can support this mandate by serving as the data-validator for Certified Capacity Studies, ensuring findings are based on granular, site-specific reality rather than lagging citywide datasets.

Addressing AMI (Section 13-02 & 13-04)

The current definition of "Affordable Dwelling Unit" in Section 13-02 is overly broad, treating units at 130% AMI the same as those at 30% AMI. To ensure "low production" status reflects a failure to meet community needs, the production formula in Section 13-03 must be amended from a simple percentage to a Weighted Adjusted Rate (R_{adj}):

$$R_{adj} = \frac{\sum(\text{New Affordable Units} \times w_{AMI})}{\text{Total Housing Units at Start of 5-Year Cycle}}$$

The production formula should apply a Weighting Factor (w_{AMI}) to ensure "low production" status reflects a failure to meet actual community needs, not just market-rate volume:

- **1.50:** Deep Affordability (0% – 30% AMI)
- **1.00:** Low Income (31% – 80% AMI)
- **0.25:** Moderate/Middle Income (81% – 120%+ AMI)

III. Preservation Exclusion and Unit Production

Section 13-04(c) explicitly excludes preserved affordable housing from the production count. In West Harlem, where the priority is anti-displacement and the stabilization of existing affordable homeownership (such as HDFCs) and rent-stabilized stock, this rule effectively punishes the district for its success.

Correction

The CPC must include Substantial Rehabilitation and Permanent Affordability Extensions in the production count under Section 13-04(c). Ignoring preservation work artificially lowers the production rate, potentially triggering a Fast Track that ignores local preference for preservation over new high-density construction.

Addressing "Paper Units"

Because the methodology triggers once a permit is issued rather than at the Certificate of Occupancy (C of O), developers can sit on permits to manipulate district rates based on market

timing. The CPC must move toward a verification system tracking actual delivery (by C of O) to ensure the "Start Date" reflects real construction progress.

IV. Community Boards as Risk Mitigators

Community Boards must be part of the methodology as risk mitigators. The current initial review is far too late to address (1) Neighborhood Character and (2) Necessity findings required under the new rules.

Early Involvement

Strategic participation must begin at the RFP stage. This allows the City to identify site-specific constraints before the Board of Standards and Appeals (BSA) 60-day review clock begins, where applications can currently be approved in as little as 30 days.

Closed Record Guardrail

To act as risk mitigators, CBs must be provided with data before the clock starts. I recommend that the BSA 60-day review clock shall not commence until the applicant provides a Community Impact Statement specifically analyzing the potential loss of 3+ bedroom family units. This prevents developers from rushing "closed record" approvals in 30 days without addressing displacement risks.

V. Infrastructure "Hard Triggers" and ELURP Neutralization

The Expedited Land Use Review Procedure (ELURP) eliminates the City Council's "member deference" hammer for FAR increases under 30%. In an R6-R8 context, this provides a "sweet spot" for developers to bypass public negotiation entirely.

Mandatory Capacity Studies

Under Section 197-f, the CPC must find adequacy of existing infrastructure. This finding should be based on a certified district-level capacity study covering sewers, school seats, and healthcare, which can be updated every 24 months.

The Hard Trigger

If a district is at 110% capacity, the Fast Track must be suspended, and the project must revert to a full ULURP/EIS process. This provides a necessary check to ensure "fast" development does not break local infrastructure.

VI. Summary of Impact on Manhattan Community Districts 9 and 10

According to the J Bond Center for Urban Studies, Harlem contains 269 city-owned properties. Under ELURP, the disposition of these sites could proceed through an expedited process that

eliminates the City Council as the final decision-maker. This shift concentrates final decision-making at the BSA or the CPC, reducing the time and leverage available to negotiate for design refinements, open space, and community facilities. This provides an opportunity for Community Boards to become strategic partners rather than passive observers.

Furthermore, the new Affordable Housing Appeals Board allows a 2-1 vote to overturn local decisions. This elevates the Borough President's authority and makes borough-wide policy more decisive than the granular, local expertise of CB9.

VII. Conclusion

The proposed rules should not be a purely mathematical formula that rewards volume over value. By codifying Community Board involvement as a "milestone" in the methodology and weighting production by AMI, the City can bridge the gap between administrative finality and the actual adequacy of development. The "Fast Track" must not become a tool for displacing the very residents it claims to serve.