
New York City is the most populous city in the US, and is estimated to exceed 9 million people in population by the year 2030. The City of New York consists of five boroughs totalling just over 300 square miles of land, and has a significant impact on the financial, fashion, commerce, media, art, technology and education industries. It is also the world headquarters for the United Nations and has a strong international relations presence. The city has predominantly relied on inherited infrastructure and delayed much needed improvements for most of the second half of the 21st century.

Project overview

In 2007, 25 state agencies united and collectively launched the PlaNYC project to achieve a greater and greener New York City. PlaNYC aims to increase the supply/affordability of housing, ensure accessible green space to residents and tourists, increase air and waterway quality, divert solid waste from landfills, expand transportation choices/reliability, and progress environmental sustainability through decreased greenhouse gas emissions, reduction in energy consumption, and decontamination of the Brownfields. As part of the environmental sustainability initiatives, PlaNYC has enacted a green building legislation equivalent to making a city the size of Oakland carbon neutral, completed over 100 energy efficient retrofits to city-owned buildings, committed \$1.5 billion for green infrastructure to aid clean waterways, and has executed regulations to phase out the use of dirty heating fuels. The city plans to continually assess opportunities to further reduce greenhouse gas emissions to reach a reduction of 80 percent by the year 2050. Many of the longer-term plans are still underway, but significant progress has been made.

Results and impact

PlaNYC has successfully launched 97 percent of the 127 initiatives finalized in 2007. Over 64,000 units of housing were created or preserved for New York City residents. In addition, 20+ transit-oriented re-zonings were implemented to provide accessibility to transit for the new housing developments. Over 250,000 more New Yorkers are within a 10 minute walk of a park, and under-utilised spaces have been re-conceptualised into green space. The city boasts drastic emissions reductions in the most frequently used vehicles: 30 percent of the taxi fleet has converted to 'green vehicles'; and launched its first bus rapid transit system. The city has planted over 800,000 of the planned one million trees, and has committed to expanding the Greenstreets program. The Greenstreets program transforms unused road space by planting trees which capture storm water and improve water quality.

Enablers

The city has defined measurable goals and performance metrics to remain accountable and transparent. This accountability has directly contributed to the success of PlaNYC, but another major factor that continues to drive the performance of the program is the involvement of New Yorkers. Supporters at every level are coming together to execute the initiatives. From community-based organisations to individuals, the success is dependent on the recurring involvement of residents. Even neighbours are banding together to create a plan to improve their own city block. Hundreds of groups of people with diverse backgrounds are coming together with one idea in common: they care enough to create change in their neighbourhoods – change that will result in a greener, greater place to call home.

