

March 19, 2019

Dear Governor Cuomo,

There is an important deadline approaching for communities across New York State to qualify as Opportunity Zones that create incentives for private investments in economic revitalization projects in low income communities. That deadline is March 21, 2018.

Our community on the Lower East Side of Manhattan (LES) is contained within eligible zones as determined by U.S. Treasury and U.S. Census data, and highlighted on the interactive map provided by the Community Development Financial Institutions Fund.¹ The LES also meets the criteria as detailed in IRS Rev. Proc. 2018-16.

The LES is still rebuilding after Superstorm Sandy, and remains vulnerable to floods, power outages and other environmental hazards. In addition, the crisis in affordable housing leads to greater displacement, resulting in higher health costs not only for those displaced but also for those who remain.² There is still a great need for resources to develop a safer and resilient built environment to house and sustain our homes and businesses.

Investing in community resilience, renewable energy, and energy efficiency improves our safety, health, and quality of life. The value of resilience is measured by the avoided costs related to health care, business losses, and other losses associated with a disaster or displacement. Investments in resilience result in workforce development, local jobs and economic revitalization. The savings have a multiplying impact and measurable results. For example in a recent study published by the American Council for an Energy-Efficient Economy: "New York City would see the greatest benefits (from energy efficiency) – more than \$1 billion in avoided health harms – over a one-year period."

¹ (www.cdfifund.gov/pages/opportunity-zones.aspx)

² In the Lower East Side and Chinatown, between 2006 & 2014, residents who were displaced saw an increase by 124.5% in hospital visits and those who remained saw a 17% increase ("Impact of Residential Displacement on Healthcare Access and Mental Health among Original Residents of Gentrifying Neighborhoods in New York City," Lim, Sungwoo et al., Plos One, Dec 22 2017)

LESReady! Member Organizations

- 9BC Tompkins Sq. Block Association
- All the Way E. 4th St Block Association
- American Red Cross
- Catholic Charities
- Charles B. Wang Community Health Center
- Chinese Progressive Association
- Chinese-American Planning Council
- Cooper Square Committee
- East Side Tabernacle
- Good Old Lower East Side, Inc.
- Grand St. Settlement
- Green Map System
- Henry Street Settlement
- Lower East Side Coalition Housing Development, Inc
- Lower East Side Community Partnership
- Lower East Side Power Partnership
- Manhattan CB 3
- Nazareth Housing Inc.
- New York Disaster Interfaith Services
- Occupy Sandy
- Ryan-NENA Community Health Center
- Sixth Street Community Center
- Two Bridges Neighborhood Council
- University Settlement
- Village East Towers Emergency Preparedness Task Force
- WiFi- NY

Those statistics only measure the impact of efficiency. Add to that avoided costs from power outages by installing distributed energy, storage and smart grids, the economic impacts of these investments become critical as well as wise.

Our community participated in a New York State Energy and Research Development Authority (NYSERDA) NY Prize study by Beyond the Grid to create Community Microgrids, NMIC Weatherization Programs, NYSERDA Solarize LES, and supported Rebuild by Design's East Side Coastal Resiliency and Lower Manhattan Coastal Resiliency projects. We understand there is much work ahead of us to meet NY State's critical goals under Reforming the Energy Vision by developing distributed energy resources, solar, storage, smart grids, and to meet the State's goals for reducing carbon and greenhouse gas emissions through clean energy and energy efficiency.

Our vision is to perform holistic building retrofits on low-income multifamily housing in our zone to bring them up to contemporary energy and efficiency standards. We have identified at least 150 existing sites with varying scales and clear needs. By aggregating numerous sites into one project, we can create inclusive, neighborhood-wide change, having a substantial impact in terms of economy, climate, and quality of life.

Funding is a barrier to realizing these goals while preserving affordable housing, given the up-front costs. In light of Federal cuts to programs and safety nets that assist vulnerable populations, the rise in costs for renewable energy development due to new tariffs on solar imports, and cuts to energy efficiency programs, the burden on our residents is greater than ever. Opportunity Zone designation for the LES will enable us flourish into a model resilient community -- a win-win to be shared with other communities.

The LES has been burdened by development that does not center the existing community. We see this as an opportunity to use investment, not to further gentrify our neighborhoods, but rather to address the needs of our persevering community. The signers of this letter all have a commitment to serve our community by defining a holistic and comprehensive community development plan on our own terms to preserve the affordability, culture, characteristic and integrity of the Lower East Side.

By designating the LES as an Opportunity Zone, we will be eligible to attract private impact investments in essential resiliency, energy efficiency, renewable energy, and economic development to benefit the people who live and work on the Lower East Side.

Please nominate our community as a qualified Opportunity Zone before the time runs out. Help us do our part in creating a more resilient and healthy NY State.

Signed,
LESReady Executive Committee

Steve Herrick, Executive Director
Cooper Square Committee

Laura Sewell, Executive Director
East Village Community Coalition

Ryan Gilliam, Executive Director
Fourth Arts Block NYC (FABnyc)

Damaris Reyes, Executive Director
Good Old Lower East Side

Wendy E. Brawer, Founder and Director
Green Map System

David Garza, Executive Director
Henry Street Settlement

Mary Kaye Orr, Executive Director
Nazareth Housing

Victor Papa, Executive Director
Two Bridges Neighborhood Council

Laura Timme, Associate Executive Director
University Settlement

Joan Daneil and Daniel Meyers, co-chairs
Village East Towers Emergency Preparedness Task Force

Paul Garrin, Founder and Director,
WiFi-NY

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