



**City Council Committee on Governmental Operations
January 20, 2021
Testimony on The Future of City Government Office Space**

Members of the committee, my name is Eric Adams and I am the Brooklyn Borough President, representing 2.6 million Brooklynites. Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on this critically important issue.

As the COVID-19 pandemic has continued to ravage our city, inflicting economic devastation and hardship across the five boroughs, it has never been more important to take every opportunity to go far outside the traditional box of thinking when it comes to a responsible recovery that is conscious of the new paradigm we are now entering. This oversight hearing is integral to begin this analysis.

In June of last year, I, along with Chair Cabrera and Council Member Cornegy, asked the New York City Department of Citywide Administrative Services (DCAS) to conduct an expedited assessment of City office space within the DCAS portfolio and the capacity for conversions to 100 percent affordable housing use.

New York City is facing a fiscal shortfall that is already in the billions, and the City's projected budgetary cuts threaten to severely exacerbate the crises we have faced long before the virus hit our city, such as our lack of sufficient affordable housing. At the same time, the pandemic has revealed the ability of many of our municipal government's operations to function effectively in a remote capacity. While it is clear that not every City worker will be permanently telecommuting, we should expect that working remotely will be a more common and likely cost-effective practice in the months and years ahead, including for those serving in an administrative and/or clerical capacity.

As discussed in the City Council's executive budget hearing for governmental operations, the cost for City office space is a significant expenditure, including the increasing costs of leasing real estate and the outlays for heating, air conditioning, lighting, and powering governmental buildings. At the same time, the need for affordable housing is expected to intensify amid an extended economic recovery and high levels of rent burden, while the City currently plans to cut more than \$1 billion in spending toward projects to create and preserve the units we sorely need. These hard realities compel us to examine the footprint of our existing City office space — its cost as well as its current and projected utility going forward — and to layer that examination with a review of the floor plates that may lend themselves to residential conversions.

The inquiry would be targeted to opportunities for 100 percent affordable housing, to repurpose our limited resources in an innovative fashion that maximizes benefit for the countless New Yorkers facing housing insecurity. I would also support the exploration of utilizing such space for small businesses at below-market commercial leases. This is a time for government to make difficult choices, and that includes adapting to new work realities and fiscal constraints. Remote working is certainly a disruption from what we are used to doing, but we should be adaptive and predictive to the long-term changes that have been accelerated by this pandemic. After all, today's workplace model has already been on the precipice of a major shift due to the accelerating digital revolution.

Thank you again for holding this important hearing and I look forward to working with the committee and agency stakeholders to make this vision a reality.