

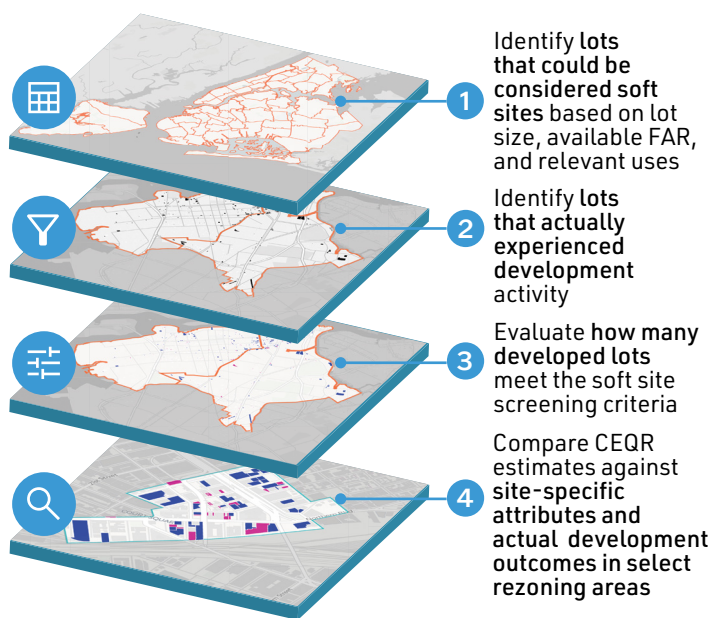
## Introduction

SITE x SITE is an unprecedented study of citywide development by the Municipal Art Society and Regional Plan Association that illustrates the limitations of City Environmental Quality Review (CEQR). CEQR is New York City's process for disclosing and evaluating the impacts that discretionary land use decisions like neighborhood rezonings have on traffic, schools, open space, residential displacement, and other environmental categories. Twenty percent of all residential development undergoes CEQR (DCP 2019). Therefore, it is critical that development projections and evaluations are based on reliable information.

CEQR evaluations estimate the amount of development that could be expected based on the developability, or "softness" of sites within a rezoning area and assumptions about population shifts, development trends, and other factors. Deficient soft site analyses have led to underestimations and overestimations of development in some of the City's most recent neighborhood rezonings. This can have unintended consequences for communities. While neither the City nor CEQR practitioners have the ability or the expectation to predict future development, SITE x SITE shows that basing estimates on actual trends would result in more reliable CEQR evaluations.

## Project Overview

The *CEQR Technical Manual* outlines the analysis criteria for conducting evaluations. It recommends specific parameters for use, density, and size as well as more general guidance on other factors that can influence development, like real estate trends, policies, and population shifts. These criteria are used to identify likely soft sites. SITE x SITE uses public data, validated by statistical modeling and historical development trends, to simulate CEQR soft site identification and compare outcomes against actual development. The study also demonstrates the limitations of CEQR methodology in capturing the full extent and impact of development that can occur following neighborhood rezonings.



SITE x SITE Methodology Diagram

## Recommendations

1. Update baseline thresholds for lot size and FAR to reflect historic trends across geographies and improve the RWCDs framework by identifying real estate trends, socioeconomic changes, and applicable public policy that support development projections.
2. Develop place-types or geographic profiles based on historical development trends and attributes to inform soft site analysis and land use decisions.
3. Increase viable development alternatives in CEQR evaluations and allow community-initiated concepts to improve land use applications.
4. Realign spatial planning with critical investments in infrastructure, maintenance, and operations to address long standing disparities and support a coordinated growth strategy.

# Our Findings

Approximately seven percent of tax lots that existed between 2007 and 2017 were large enough and had sufficient unbuilt FAR to meet baseline CEQR soft site criteria. Only a fifth of lots developed during that time were identified as soft sites. In reality, lot size, available FAR, and other site characteristics vary across neighborhoods, owing to differences in zoning districts that regulate density, building typologies, and allowable uses. To provide greater insight into site-specific trends and conditions that can affect development, SITE x SITE examined select neighborhoods based on six development planning scenarios.



**SCENARIO 1:  
Rezoned to incentivize development/  
CEQR underestimated projections**

The Downtown Brooklyn (2004) rezoning was intended to spur development to foster a new downtown commercial core. While development did occur, the type significantly diverged from what was anticipated in the CEQR process. The area has seen eight times the estimated residential floor area and commercial space has lagged behind.

Pictured: 86 Fleet Place, Brooklyn



**SCENARIO 4:  
Rezoned to control development &  
preserve neighborhood character**

The rezonings of Ozone Park (2013), Williamsbridge/Baychester (2011), and Bay Ridge (2005) can be generally described as downzonings with a secondary objective of directing mixed-use development towards major corridors. However, actual development in these priority areas has been slow.

Pictured: White Plains Road, the Bronx; 80th Street, Queens; 76th Street, Queens



**SCENARIO 2:  
Rezoned to incentivize development/  
CEQR overestimated projections**

In the case of the 125th Street Corridor (2008) & Lower Concourse (2009) rezonings, CEQR projections overestimated overall development. Despite intentions to increase residential density and create affordable housing, fewer units have been built than anticipated.

Pictured: 1824 Park Avenue, Manhattan; 417 Gerard Avenue, the Bronx



**SCENARIO 5:  
No neighborhood rezoning,  
but substantial development is  
taking place**

Rezonings can be a tool to guide growth in city neighborhoods. But in the absence of a well-planned rezoning proposal, neighborhoods like Crown Heights, Brooklyn are contending with fragmented development that may not align with a community-wide vision.

Pictured: 870 Atlantic Avenue, Brooklyn



**SCENARIO 3:  
Rezoned to support affordable housing  
& economic development**

The East New York Neighborhood Plan (2016) was the first neighborhood rezoning to implement the Mandatory Inclusionary Housing (MIH) program. The current challenge is in determining whether new development is in-line with neighborhood needs.

Pictured: 2817 Atlantic Avenue, Brooklyn



**SCENARIO 6:  
Planned Development**

The Hudson Yards Rezoning and Development Program (2005) was an unprecedented megaproject that sought to extend the Midtown business district into what was then an underutilized area to the west. CEQR estimates were reliable but recent market changes have affected overall occupancy.

Pictured: Hudson Yards, Manhattan



Scan the QR code to access the mapping tool and report via [sitexsite.nyc](http://sitexsite.nyc).  
Note: The mapping tool is optimized for viewing on a computer or tablet.



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