Environmental Protection and Economic Development

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1. Introduction

For decades, environmental protection and economic growth have been framed as competing priorities, a perceived tradeoff persistent in local and national political discourse. This chapter argues that this framing is inaccurate, particularly at the urban scale, where environmental protection enables enhanced quality of life, job creation, taxation opportunities, productivity increases, and attracts visitors and in-migration of people and businesses. The "Background" section discusses the economic costs of pollution as well as the misconception of the environment-economy tradeoff, utilizing national data and evidence to illustrate the scalability of economic returns from environmental investment. To further cement the argument, the next sections, "Environmental Quality as an Economic Asset – PlaNYC's Conceptual Breakthrough" and "Post-Bloomberg: PlaNYC's Continuing Influence," define the setting against which PlaNYC came to be and its ongoing influence, two decades later. The "Discussion" section focuses on the current challenges facing New York City through the same environmental-economic lens. Finally, the "Conclusion" section argues economic growth does not merely coexist with environmental protection but depends on it. Cities seeking fiscal stability and growth must treat environmental investment as core economic policy rather than a peripheral concern when considering their long-term goals.

2. Background

For many years, environmental protection has been seen as self-justifying—an action that had to be taken for the sole purpose of ensuring the survival of local nature, completely unrelated to socioeconomic considerations. While many people see environmental protection as a worthy goal, it was seen as a cost and a drag on economic growth. In fact, to this day, Gallup continues to poll on the seeming tradeoff between economic growth and environmental protection, only to find most Americans believe the government is not doing enough to protect the environment, maintaining that a clean environment is more important than economic growth. With the exception of the years of the 2008-2009 recession, Americans have consistently favored cleaning up the environment rather than prioritizing growth. In our view, this survey question is based on a fundamental misconception: the environment-economic development tradeoff is a false tradeoff.

While often described as a worthwhile endeavor, beneficial for the preservation of both the local cultural heritage and climate, 'environmental protection' as a concept was not perceived to be crucial for economic growth on local, regional, and international levels by many elites. There are political and business leaders who do not care if economic growth causes environmental damage, and there are environmental advocates who do not believe economic growth can occur without causing environmental damage. However, this perception is ultimately historically inaccurate: since the 1980s, the United States has managed to decouple GDP growth and environmental pollution. With public policies ranging from command-and-control regulations to direct and indirect government subsidies, businesses and governments developed and applied technologies that reduced pollution while allowing for continued economic growth. The misconception that environmental protection impairs economic growth fails to identify the snowball effect the environment has on daily urban economic activities and the interconnection between the viability of the global economic order, urban resilience, and the wellbeing of our environment. It also understates the positive economic impact of innovative technologies.

2.1. The Economic Costs of Pollution

Environmental protection takes on many forms, some clearer than others, spanning preventative, remedial, and policy-based steps taken to protect our environment, from campaigns to save the rainforests to toxic industrial land remediation to carbon pricing initiatives. In urban settings, environmental protection efforts and their corresponding

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economic benefits have major impacts on individual and organizational cost savings, municipal tax revenue, tourism, and consumption.

One of the key challenges of urban growth is land availability; the physical expansion of a city is dependent on space for the city to grow within. One method of addressing this challenge is through active remediation of contaminated and abandoned industrial areas, sometimes called "brownfields." A Brookings study found that over 185 American counties used to be heavily reliant on local manufacturing industries for their economic growth. However, as manufacturers left cities, often to be replaced by service businesses, they left behind severe land and water pollution. An example of this is Flint, Michigan, a booming car manufacturing city in the early 20th century. Flint is dealing with lead contamination in its water to this day, as well as subsequent resident health impacts, such as declining birth rates and unexplained mortality. Like many deindustrialized cities, it also has a great deal of abandoned factory sites.

According to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), there are over 450,000 brownfields across the United States, covering over 15 million acres of land. Brownfields are described as contaminated lands that were previously used and developed for a variety of purposes, frequently located in or near cities and urban areas. One of the reasons that the accumulation of brownfields accelerated in the U.S. after 1980 was the strict liability provisions of Superfund. Under those provisions, anyone who owned a piece of land with toxins on it was responsible for those toxins, even if they did not bring them to the site. Under these rules, if toxins were found, the new owner would be required to find and sue those who polluted the land. This led developers to site new business and residential facilities on exurban "greenfields," where there was virtually no possibility of toxic contamination. An EPA study from 2024 found that the remediation and redevelopment of brownfield sites is extremely financially beneficial for municipalities in comparison to the construction and development of "green," untouched land. Beginning in 1995, the federal government began to revise Superfund's liability requirements to enable the development of urban brownfields. The 2002 Small Business Liability Relief and Brownfields Revitalization Act created a formal Brownfields program.

Redevelopment of brownfields allows for the preservation of existing green lands and protection of native vegetation and wildlife. Moreover, redevelopment typically includes the remediation or at least containment of polluted areas and directly lowers pollution impacts. From an economic growth angle, the financial benefits are also broad-reaching: redevelopment and remediation of brownfields located in strategic pre-developed areas with existing urban infrastructure connectivity lowers the burden of infrastructure expansion required to support the new development. Without the need to invest in envelope services and develop new road systems, sewage systems, electrical grids, gas lines, and connections to other municipal and regional networks, the municipality will save significant financial resources. Furthermore, the redevelopment of brownfield sites drastically increases the land values of its surrounding neighborhoods, raising housing prices and directly leading to higher municipal property tax revenue. In New York City, property taxes amount to over a quarter of the city's annual budget. In most American cities, the property tax is an even more important source of revenue. An increase in land value due to remediation significantly impacts the tax revenues of the city, directly influencing the city's finances.

A separate advantage of land rehabilitation is that redevelopment facilitates resiliency preparedness and subsequent future savings from less costly disaster impacts. The remediation of contaminated grounds has an impact on the land's ability to absorb excess water in the event of extreme weather events, thus lowering the municipality's need to invest in expanding its rainwater capture system. This is especially important from a resiliency point of view in highly developed areas: roads, sidewalks, and other pedestrian infrastructure were rarely designed with floods and acute weather events in mind when the American urbanization process began and are rarely designed to deal with

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Prepared for PlaNYC at 20: A Retrospective on 20 Years of Sustainability Planning in NYC, December 2026

these problems now. About 90% of natural disasters in the United States involve flooding. In coastal cities, this can lead to life-threatening situations. There were 145 flood-related fatalities nationally in 2024. In 2025, New York City experienced multiple flash floods for the first time since 2021, following Hurricane Ida's indirect effects. Increasing the land's water absorption ability, in conjunction with taking other active steps to ensure better water drainage in urban areas, is a key step to prevent loss of lives.

The Clean Air Act of 1970 has had a significant impact on the American economy to this day. Studies report a direct correlation between pollution exposure and individual health effects, which in turn influences the workforce's productivity. A 2017 study found that each 10-unit increase in the pollution index reduced worker productivity by 0.35%. This finding stretches beyond sectors and includes blue-collar manual workers and cognitive-intensive white-collar workers, the productivity of which may be more financially significant in broader economic terms. In Los Angeles' service sector alone, a 0.35% productivity drop is estimated to lead to $374 million annual revenue loss. For many years, the EPA demonstrated that for every dollar invested in clean air, the result was about fifteen dollars of health and productivity benefits.

The prevalence and severity of air pollution in urban areas may result in shortened lifespans, chronic bronchitis, heart attacks, and respiratory illness, as well as frequent or recurring hospital visits. The regulations pertaining to air pollutants have drastically improved individuals' health, leading to both enhanced productivity and GDP growth. The improvement in health also lowered medical expenses for both individuals and the government, generating approximately 82 billion USD of healthcare spending savings.

Acute air pollution also leads to substantial retail revenue loss. A 2017 study found that Spanish consumers consume between $29 and $48 million less on days that ozone pollution is 10 percent worse than usual, with "urban citizens' spending habits [being] four times more affected by air pollution than [those of] rural citizens." Moreover, on polluted days, pedestrian volumes can decline between 5.2% and 12.7%. In urban commercial areas reliant on foot traffic for sales revenue, these reductions may lead to heavy financial losses. For example, consumer industries, predominantly retail stores and restaurants, see an 18% unrecoverable sales decline on days with medium to high wildfire smoke, a form of air pollution, as there is a negative correlation between retail site visits and polluting events. In fact, store closures and staff downsizing in areas where there is concern about climate change are higher than in areas less concerned about climate change. Taking into account the potential impact air pollution has on in-person consumption, consumer industries in urban areas are at very high risk of being impacted by the lack of investment in environmental protection while web-based consumer platforms see growth.

Retail accounts for 12% of business in New York City and 9% of its private sector jobs, providing a substantial contribution to the sales tax revenue of the State, City, and MTA. Recurring air pollution events that divert consumers from in-person consumption to web-based consumption will not only impact small businesses but also tax revenue through loss of sales, storefront closures, and workforce downsizing.

As previously mentioned, water pollution is another substantial threat to urban economic growth. On top of the potential health repercussions and their associated higher healthcare expenses, water pollution remediation is an expensive and long process to take on. According to a review of the New York City Watershed Protection Program, proactive environmental protection of water sources is more economically beneficial than water filtration systems. New York City's watershed is an important economic asset, supplying water to its ~10 million residents. Since 1997, the City has invested over $2.5 billion in watershed maintenance and protection, while the initial potential cost of an appropriately sized filtration plant is estimated at $8-10 billion. Assuming the plant will need continued

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maintenance, manpower, and further developments, the economic rationale for protecting the watershed is crystal clear.

However, despite the accumulation of evidence of the close ties between a clean environment and prosperous urban economies, the fallacy of the environment-economy tradeoff persists. It is easy to see how and why this false trade-off concept developed. In the early days of environmental protection regulation in the United States, cleaning up pollution required expensive add-ons to existing technologies. Catalytic converters were added to motor vehicles and stack scrubbers were added to power plants. These "add-ons" increased expenses, and pollution control was seen as an economic cost rather than a benefit. The concept of designing lower environmental impacts into a product's design was a generation away. Today's electric vehicles and solar panels do not require additions to reduce pollution; they are designed that way.

Still, in our view, the most important conceptual breakthrough on the environment-economic growth tradeoff came with Michael Bloomberg's PlaNYC 2030, which explicitly considered a clean environment a prerequisite for New York's economic development. The plan recognized that cities are in a global competition for residents, tourists, and businesses. Parks, clean air, and reduced traffic congestion were seen as having specific monetary value. If a city is dirty, polluted, and without adequate open spaces and effective transit, it loses in that global competition. Moreover, if population and economic growth were projected, the city must invest in infrastructure to provide water, energy, and waste management for the growing population. In fact, the absence of a clean environment was seen in PlaNYC as an obstacle to economic growth.

3. Environmental Quality as an Economic Asset – PlaNYC's Conceptual Breakthrough

One of the key unique characteristics of PlaNYC is the reframing of common environmental protection concepts as economic assets. This includes, amongst others, the lowering of greenhouse gas emissions from buildings, emphasis on tree planting and green space accessibility, expansion of public transportation options, and discouraging private vehicle usage. This approach was supported by the growing understanding of the role of cities and urban metropolises in nature conservation efforts.

3.1. The Evolution of Environmental Protection and a History of Pollution Control

Awareness of environmental protection and the necessity of pollution control developed over the course of history, primarily due to severe global crises. The obvious, visible aspects of pollution were the first to be discussed: after repeated pandemics, cities and urban areas around the world recognized the connection between unsanitary environments and waste pollution with public health emergencies. However, instead of using this logic to further spread human settlements and thus lower the risk of individuals infecting one another, urbanization was accelerated; the combination of access, convenience, community, and employment opportunities made the idea of urban areas appealing to many individuals and seemed to be a crucial aspect of economic growth. The added benefit of urbanization, whether fully conscious or not, is the preservation of natural environments. Continued development of preexisting settlements meant other natural habitats of flora and fauna remained far from the reach of industrialization, thus less affected by environmental harms.

However, the mere theoretical distance from harm did not exclude it from taking place; urbanization requires resources, and the nature surrounding human settlements was, and still is, the prime resource for building out that environment. With time, the cost of nature became more

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obvious; if at first a cost was attributed to the harvested materials themselves, in recent decades an added cost has started to emerge—the cost of their loss. Gradually, it became clearer that further developing existing urban areas is a form of environmental protection. The redevelopment and reconfiguration of cities prevent further expansion of human settlements in untouched lands, while also capitalizing on existing infrastructure, social centers, commercial activities, healthcare services, and more.

3.2. NYC in Transition – The Economic and Social Climates that Propelled PlaNYC

Economic transitions take time but do take place. New York City first became prominent as a trading city, with America's resources and farm goods delivered via the Erie Canal to be shipped out of the port of New York. Then, New York City became a manufacturing city, at one time making nearly all the clothing worn in America. Today, we are a center of finance, communication, fashion design, entertainment, the arts, health care, research, and education. We are no longer just a shipping port or a center of manufacturing but a global capital of ideas, design, innovation, finance, and commerce. Slowly but surely, we are on the path toward environmental sustainability. Along with New York State, we have ambitious carbon reduction goals, and our utilities are struggling to make our energy grid more renewable and our energy system more efficient and reliable. The path has not been direct, with inflation, mismanagement, Not In My Back Yard (NIMBY) attitudes, a reactionary national government, and pandemics upending some of our plans.

New York City was in a unique position in the early 2000s. The city experienced the lowest violent crime rates it has had in decades, and the economic and psychological recovery from the September 11 attack created both a challenge and opportunity for Michael Bloomberg as he began his first term as Mayor.

This new spirit was amplified by the NYC leadership of the time. NYC labor unions saw consistent, powerful leadership throughout their member organizations, garnering substantial amounts of political influence. In City Hall, the election of Michael Bloomberg, a Democrat-turned-Republican-turned-Independent, for three consecutive terms allowed for the formation of long-term policy-planning from a unique perspective: awareness of the political goals, gripes, and challenges of both parties, combined with a private sector problem-solving approach.

This backdrop was instrumental to the rise of Mayor Bloomberg's municipal policies. His early years in office are easy to define as seeking broad municipal revitalization, particularly in education, taxation, and neighborhood renewal, the latter being instrumental to the economic revival of the city. After September 11, Mayor Bloomberg pushed for a substantial expansion of the renovation and economic resurgence of Midtown and Lower Manhattan, primarily Times Square, Hudson Yards, Chelsea, and the Lower East Side. Providing a boost for both local residents and the city's economy, these renovation efforts aimed at keeping New Yorkers hopeful about the future of the city after the terror attack and communal trauma. These actions were indicative of his aspirations to strengthen the city's economy by providing better services to the middle and upper classes. The fabric of the city began changing as the crime-ridden reputation of New York began to be a thing of the past. Understanding the city was changing for the better, Mayor Bloomberg prepared for the expected subsequent growth of its population by addressing the livability of the city through zoning changes, financial policies, and PlaNYC—the main pathway to ensure New York continued to be livable while supporting a substantial rise in the number of New Yorkers.

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Despite the progress that was made in the prior years, 2012's Hurricane Sandy posed a devastating blow to New York City's economy. The hurricane caused damages of over $19 billion and taught decision-makers and the broad public about the threat of climate-induced extreme weather events to a city with 600 miles of coastline. More than anything, it proved New Yorkers needed to build resilient infrastructure to adapt to global warming. As years went by, the number of warnings of potential disasters increased; from the accelerating rate of sea level rise, the drastically inconsistent weather patterns throughout the year, massive rain, wind, and snow storms, as well as heatwaves, drought, and forest fires, it was clear that climate change posed a real-world threat. In addition to the obvious disruptions to New Yorkers' day-to-day lives, these acute weather events were also detrimental to the city's financial well-being, underpinning the notion that environmental protection provides more than just economic growth—it also offers financial resiliency.

4. Post-Bloomberg: PlaNYC's Continuing Influence on NYC

When he issued his path-breaking PlaNYC 2030, then-Mayor Michael Bloomberg effectively countered the perception of the economic growth-environmental protection trade-off by demonstrating the economic value of an environmentally sustainable city. This innovative framework lived beyond Bloomberg's mayoralty and ensured environmental protection was cemented as essential for New York City's continued economic growth, imperative to tackling the challenges facing the city.

One of the most influential changes of PlaNYC under Mayor Bloomberg was to address the impact of population growth on existing infrastructure. In a world where most people live in cities and where over 70% of humanity will become urban dwellers by 2050, the creative use of land for rest, recreation, and community gathering is essential. The underlying concept of PlaNYC was simple: cities were now in a global competition for people and business. This required cities to ensure effective mass transit and uncongested traffic, ample and accessible parkland, clean and reliable energy, as well as clean air and drinking water. To compete, cities also needed low crime, great nightlife, accessible health care, and an excellent education system. Since many urbanites live in apartments, access to outdoor space is not a luxury but rather a necessity. Human health and welfare require access to nature. This was recognized in Mayor Bloomberg's PlaNYC 2030 and has been accepted as public policy in New York City for generations. The Bloomberg team rejected the tradeoff between environmental protection and economic growth, declaring that a clean environment was a prerequisite for economic growth. Environmental protection was not perceived as a financial burden, but an asset.

PlaNYC has been impacting New Yorkers of all walks of life throughout the past twenty years. While climate was not a main theme of the 2025 mayoral election campaign, climate and environmental protection-related issues are deeply intertwined with basic economic factors, influencing the matters New Yorkers care about most, with three main examples being found in buildings, access to green space, and transportation.

4.1. Local Law 97

In most of the United States, the largest source of greenhouse gas pollution is transportation. In New York City, our largest source is buildings. This is because most New Yorkers rely on mass transit rather than personal transit, so our transportation system is both efficient and relatively clean. However, our buildings tend to be old and energy inefficient. If we are to contribute to reducing global warming and maintaining global competitiveness, we must retrofit our old buildings to be more energy-efficient and less reliant on fossil fuels.

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In their 2019 study, the National Institute of Building Sciences found every $1 spent on government-supported mitigation reduced future catastrophe recovery expenses by $6. Modern building codes include sustainability and resiliency elements, which result in further future savings, valued at an $11 return for every $1 spent. As the threat of floods looms over the City, investment in resilience now is a practical way to guarantee future savings and economic viability.

In May 2019, the New York City Council enacted Local Law 97, which requires buildings over 25,000 square feet to reduce building greenhouse gas emissions by 40% by 2030 and be net zero by 2050, with a baseline set in 2005. The law provides alternatives for some affordable housing units and houses of worship to adhere to a lower-cost pathway focused on low-cost energy efficiency measures instead of rigid carbon caps. During the first phase of implementation, from 2024 to 2029, landlords can avoid penalties by demonstrating "good faith efforts" to pursue decarbonization. We assume that some additional relief will be provided to ensure that decarbonization does not negatively impact the availability of affordable housing.

The law encompasses around 50,000 buildings, which account for 60% of New York's building area and 50% of the city's emissions. The phased approach, as well as the varying caps for different types of buildings, aims to make compliance with the law simpler and more achievable for building owners. The law also provides various methods building owners can utilize to comply, including direct emissions reductions, purchasing Renewable Energy Credits (RECs) to offset the building's electricity consumption, and purchasing certificates through the Affordable Housing Reinvestment Fund, which help fund electrification projects in affordable housing units.

Despite some resistance and worry about costs, it is clear that New York City's building owners and developers see the future and are interested in meeting the decarbonization goals to the extent they can. They also see that a more efficient and renewable resource-based energy system will, in the long run, reduce the cost of operating a building. Decarbonization can be seen as a form of building modernization. It partially depends on the electric grid becoming decarbonized, or on the type of technological advances in solar arrays and batteries that might someday allow buildings to disconnect from the grid, in much the same way people have been disconnecting from cable TV and the wired internet.

In fact, Local Law 97 became significantly intertwined with the city's construction industry, climate tech sector, and construction tech sector. Accomplishing these ambitious decarbonization goals requires innovation and practical thinking in building technologies, management practices, and construction processes. For example, the widening adoption of window heat pumps in the city can be attributed to the law. In some cases, NYC has served as a pilot program for other cities across the United States. The New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA), for example, has a history of integrating new technologies in some of its construction projects, which, if successful, have later been adopted by other housing authorities across the Northeast.

4.2. Congestion Pricing

PlaNYC 2030 introduced the framework for congestion pricing in NYC. By including congestion pricing for Lower Manhattan in the plan, Mayor Bloomberg's goal was to create a lockbox source of funds for the New York City Transit Authority and reduce the MTA's dependence on transit fares to fund the system, with the added benefit of reducing gridlock in New York City. After being

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delayed for over a decade, in 2025, New York City's congestion pricing plan came into effect due to the political support of then-powerful Governor Andrew Cuomo. Ironically, he later favored pausing implementation during his losing race for New York City Mayor in 2025. Despite wide political objection to the plan from outer-borough and suburban politicians, congestion pricing has proved to be quite beneficial to the city.

A New York Times article found that, thanks to the scheme, 73,000 fewer cars enter lower Manhattan every day, there are 9% fewer car accidents in the included areas, vehicle-related noise complaints went down by 17%, and air quality has substantially improved. The additional subsequent rise in public transportation users (about 9% daily) has also benefited local businesses, who have seen greater business revenue growth than neighboring counties. The benefits have been so clear that other cities are considering adopting a similar policy.

4.3. Accessibility of Parkland and its Economic Impact

One of the most prominent examples of PlaNYC's effects on NYC was the NYC greening initiative. The plan, and its successor, PlaNYC: Getting Sustainability Done, set the goal of ensuring that every New Yorker was provided with a green space within a ten-minute walking distance of their home. This goal aimed to both contribute to the creation of green spaces in a city with many small apartments, while also promoting cleaner air. Moreover, the initiative has some positive, unexpected side effects on tourism. A great example can be seen in the High Line Park, a once unused freight train track converted into an elevated park that is also a prime tourist attraction. The High Line's construction was announced by the Bloomberg administration in 2003, after the elevated track had been left abandoned for many years. Opening to the public in 2009, the High Line became a staple of NYC tourism and a landmark of contemporary American land architecture.

In a study published in 2022, the Trust for Public Land found New York City parks contributed billions of dollars of revenue to the city's economy through tourism (~$17.9 billion annually) and residential use (~$10 billion annually). Central Park specifically has a significant impact on New York City's economy; the Central Park Conservancy found the park generates approximately 395 million dollars annually in visitor-related spending and 875.2 million dollars annually in enhanced property tax revenue.

PlaNYC laid the foundation for the restoration of Fresh Kills landfill, one of the largest landfills in the world until its closing in 2001, into a park. While currently accessible to the public only during pre-scheduled programs, the park has been attracting thousands of visitors. New York's parks often serve a dual role for residents and tourists. It is possible that Freshkills Park, which will be completed in the mid to late 2030s, will attract tourists to Staten Island.

5. Discussion: The Current Challenges Facing NYC and Their Environmental Connections

2026 was a challenging year for New York City and the United States; extreme cold during an Arctic front, price increases at the fuel pump due to the war with Iran, rising reliance on artificial intelligence, historic heatwaves, erratic tariff policies, attacks on scientific research, attacks on immigrants, and an ever-evolving threat of a recession all contributed to a widespread sense of distress. The necessity of energy diversification, energy security, and energy independence were highlighted as key methods of keeping the American economy growing. While some may view this as an argument to increase fossil fuel development in the United States, others favor an all-of-the-above strategy

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that emphasizes renewable energy. The argument for investment in renewable energy is therefore not just an environmental argument, but an economic one. A January 2026 analysis by the Energy Information Administration found that the U.S. residential retail price of energy rose 9.6% since 2025 and natural gas prices rose 86%.

Many artificial intelligence companies have already caught on to this and started investing in building renewable energy sources to power their data centers. Since each state has different utility regulations and different energy prices, municipalities need to be proactive about lowering energy prices in their area, both for the benefit of residents and for attracting and retaining business operations in their area. This is especially crucial for data centers. The high energy usage of data centers may cause a burden on the local grid, which in turn impacts the daily operations of residents and other businesses. In the summer of 2026, New York State announced a one-year moratorium on the construction of data centers to provide the time to develop a plan for supplying electricity to these centers, despite widespread objections from the construction industry as well as National Grid.

Another leading issue facing New York City is housing, specifically affordable housing. As of 2025, one in every four New Yorkers lives in poverty, and the City's homeownership percentages are well under the state and country's average, both in Manhattan and the outer boroughs. Currently, New York needs to build around half a million new apartments but is only able to approve and build around 7,000 apartments annually. Affordable housing is a challenge in one of the most expensive cities in the world. It is simply too expensive to build new buildings without extremely high selling prices, with the extremely limited and expensive land available for these housing projects. Building regulations, zoning issues, supply chain challenges, and materials' import taxes all add to this complex situation, making the construction of new affordable dwellings on virgin land a financially unwise decision for private developers and landowners.

Simultaneously, New York has approximately 1,500 to 2,000 brownfield sites within city limits, as well as over 3,000 vacant commercial and industrial properties that cannot be utilized due to land contamination. The remediation of these sites will not only benefit environmental quality but also has the potential to free up underutilized properties and allow developers to procure relatively low-cost land. Assuming supportive zoning and residential construction regulations will be implemented, the "new" available lands can directly impact the housing market in New York City and its surrounding area, with the potential of lowering both rents and apartment prices. The remediation of these lands is not only positive environmentally but has the potential to beneficially impact the lives of millions of New Yorkers, boost the residential construction sector in the City, and reinvigorate the competition in the sector—leading to more job creation and taxable properties.

Most of New York City's street sewers are combined with sewage from buildings and street wastewater. During storms with acute rainfalls, the municipal sewer system needs to handle higher-than-average flows; however, the system's sewage treatment plants are unable to handle the sudden increase in sewage and the excess mix of stormwater and untreated sewage ends up discharged directly into the City's waterways. A 2023 economic analysis of the New York New Jersey Harbor Estuary estimates the total value of financial losses from water quality impairment may be up to $1.4 billion annually, based on monetary values households in the region allocated to potential harbor estuary-based activities, which include recreational activities, health impacts, and property values.

These NYC-specific challenges are not the only ones the City will need to deal with in the years to come. The New York State Comptroller's Office found the State has been experiencing a growing number of annual acute weather events and is likely to see even more in the years to come. Specifically, New York City is expected to see an increase in extremely hot days—from a four-day annual average to a 14- to 32-day average by 2050. By that same year, the Battery in New York City's Lower Manhattan is expected to see a sea level rise of 14 to 19 inches—well over a foot

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of water. These events will undoubtedly negatively impact the City's productivity, whether through an increase in health issues, infrastructure accessibility challenges, loss of tourism, or infrastructure destruction. Furthermore, weather-related disasters causing over $1 billion in damages have occurred at an increasing rate since 1980 in New York State, including an annual average of 2.5 events requiring federal assistance or emergency declaration.

New York City simply cannot afford a reactive approach to resiliency.

6. Conclusion: The Continued Evolution of Environmentally Driven Economic Growth

The ongoing, unresolved issues facing New York City indicate that economic growth is not an *alternative* to environmental quality; economic growth *depends* on the presence of environmental quality. Our wealth and lifestyle depend on our biosphere. Food, water, and air are provided by the earth and by productive technologies that depend on functioning ecosystems. Technologies have not yet been developed to substitute for the natural environment.

Beyond the benefits discussed in this chapter, it is important to note that environmental protection itself contributes to economic growth. Somebody makes and sells the air pollution control technologies we put on power plants and motor vehicles. Somebody builds the sewage and water treatment facilities. Just as someone makes money from solar cells and windmills, whoever invents the 1,000-mile-capacity battery that will power electric cars someday will become very, very rich. The climate problem is not caused by economic growth, but by the absence of effective public policy designed to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. There is nothing incompatible with capitalism and environmental protection if rules are in place that control the environmental impacts of the products and services we make and use. As we look ahead to the continued development of New York City, and by proxy the continued development of urban areas across the United States, it is imperative that environmental protection and environmental sustainability are taken into consideration at every step of policymaking. Not solely for the benefit of our climate, but for the sustainability of our economic growth.

PlaNYC served as an international conceptual breakthrough, connecting environmental protection and urban economic growth theoretically and practically. While overtly contributing to City finances through taxation changes, the more covert ramifications of the plan are far more complex and impactful. As PlaNYC reaches the 2030 mark cited in the plan's original name, we need to constantly rethink what is needed and what is feasible to simultaneously promote environmental protection and economic growth. The safest way to secure New York's future is by investing in its ability to withstand future environmental threats today. While tackling the housing crisis, transportation challenges, and environmental conservation, PlaNYC must put economic resiliency at its forefront through environmental protection, as the two can never truly be separated.

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