

June 25, 2024

AIA New York Testimony to the City Council Committee on Housing and Buildings on Sidewalk Sheds

Thank you, Chair Sanchez and members of the City Council Committee on Housing and Buildings, for holding this hearing today. I am Bria Donohue, Senior Manager of Government Affairs at American Institute of Architects New York. We represent more than 5,000 architects and design professionals committed to positively impacting the physical and social qualities of our city.

AIA New York supports efforts to reform sidewalk shed laws to improve the design of sidewalk sheds, get sheds down faster, and incentivize façade work be done efficiently. This is a quality-of-life issue as much as it is a public safety issue. There are almost 400 miles of sidewalk sheds citywide, taking up about 3% of the city's sidewalk space. Our city's streetscape defines New Yorkers experience in the public realm, and it is incumbent on us to transform our streets, so the beauty and unique character of New York City is not overtaken and covered by sidewalk sheds.

In an effort to improve public space and quality of life for New Yorkers by removing sheds faster, we are particularly supportive of the design changes in Intro 391, the updates to lighting requirements in Intro 660, and the inspection timeline adjustment in Intro 394. Aesthetic changes, such as increasing the minimum shed ceiling height to 12 feet, expanding the lighting requirements, and allowing more colors beyond hunter green, are a key first steps to improving the impact of sidewalk sheds on our public realm.

Additionally, it is important to note that not all buildings have the same façade damage and deterioration risks. For example, newly constructed glass buildings with do not pose the same risk as brick buildings; therefore, these buildings should not be beholden to the same frequency of inspections. Local Law 11 should be amendment to not have a one size fits all approach for inspecting building facades, and instead should take building typology and age into consideration.

AIA New York urges the City Council to pass legislation to remedy the challenges and burdens of sidewalk sheds on our city.