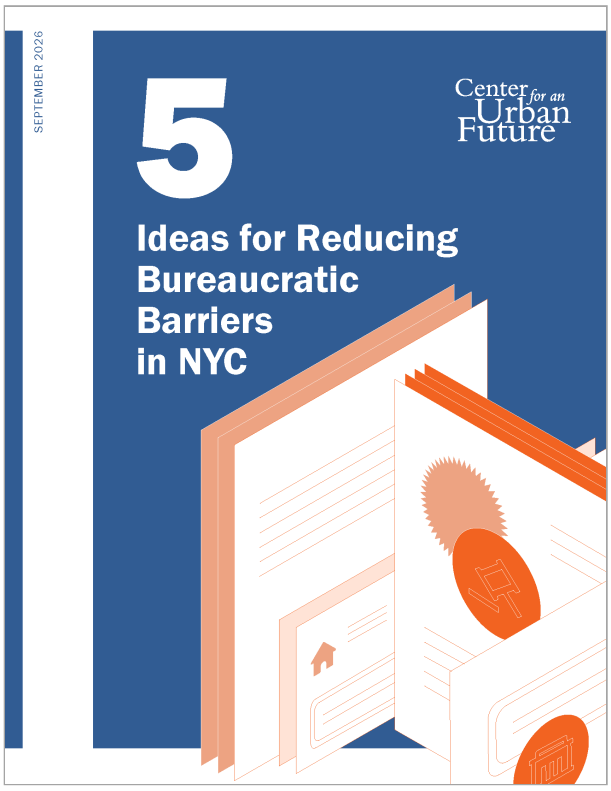

Report - September 2026

5 Ideas for Reducing Bureaucratic Barriers in NYC

This report offers five concrete ideas to reduce bureaucratic hurdles that slow government down, increase costs, and make it harder to get things done in New York.

by Jonathan Bowles and Eli Dvorkin

- **Read the full report and five ideas here.**

Mayor Mamdani's Commission on Government Efficiency (COGE) has advanced five promising ballot proposals to make city government work more efficiently. But there are numerous other opportunities to eliminate unnecessary bureaucratic hurdles that slow government down, increase costs, and make it harder to get things done in New York, many of which do not require charter changes. Reducing these frustrating, costly, and time-consuming bureaucratic rules and processes will be critical in the coming months and years as New York works to tackle serious affordability and competitiveness challenges amid growing fiscal constraints.

In researching this report, the Center for an Urban Future heard about dozens of specific rules, regulations, and processes that add significant time and cost to projects large and small or make getting things done virtually impossible. These barriers contribute to the city's sky-high housing costs, squeeze already narrow margins for small businesses and vendors, slow infrastructure projects that help prepare the city for climate change, and even contribute to staff vacancies across government. They force nonprofits to hire extra staff to navigate duplicative contracting and reporting requirements, prompt BIDs and community groups to abandon plans for block parties and other public realm events, and drive up the cost of seemingly straightforward projects, like building a park bathroom or renovating a branch library.

This report shines a light on five especially maddening bureaucratic barriers that have not yet been addressed.

These hurdles across city government get in the way of progress in New York and are ripe for reform.

THE FIVE IDEAS INCLUDE:

1. Revise the city's plumbing code to allow greater use of PVC piping, bringing New York City in line with the rest of the country.
2. Stop the city's Office of Management and Budget from re-underwriting every affordable housing project.
3. Clear the approval bottlenecks holding back battery energy storage from strengthening the grid.
4. Eliminate civil service restrictions that make it difficult for the city to hire people with the most in-demand technology skills.
5. Make joint bidding permanent to cut delays and costs on city infrastructure projects.

Read the full report and all five ideas here.

This is the latest in a series of policy reports outlining concrete ideas to keep New York City competitive amid growing fiscal and economic challenges. It follows our February 2026 report, 5 Revenue-Raising Ideas for NYC.

The series was produced in partnership with, and with support from, Winston C. Fisher and Fisher Brothers Foundation.

5 Ideas for Reducing Bureaucratic Barriers in NYC is a publication of the Center for an Urban Future. Researched and written by Jonathan Bowles and Eli Dvorkin. Additional research by Gabriel Landrein Buendia, Nora Lewis, Charlotte Sadelain, and Yona Litwin. Edited by Jonathan Bowles and Eli Dvorkin. Designed by Sarah Tan.

Center for an Urban Future (CUF) is a leading think tank focused on building a stronger and more equitable economy in New York City, and expanding economic opportunity for all New Yorkers.

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