

HABITAT *(Excerpt)*

Public Hearing on Proposed Facade-Inspection Changes

By Bendix Anderson

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The city Department of Buildings (DOB) is considering imminent changes to the Facade Inspection and Safety Program (FISP), also known as Local Law 11, which requires owners of buildings taller than six stories to inspect and repair their facades every five years. If approved, the changes are sure to increase the cost of maintaining building facades, beginning as soon as February 2020. But before the DOB approves the changes, it will hold a public hearing at which co-op and condo board members – and any other interested parties – can offer comments

According to the DOB, “Recent inspections have revealed significant deficiencies. To improve public safety, [we’re] enhancing the Qualified Exterior Wall Inspector qualifications, inspection requirements, and civil penalties against owners.” The 20 pages of proposed changes to facade-inspection rules are posted on the DOB website. Under the proposed rules, Qualified Exterior Wall Inspectors would need seven years of relevant experience – a big jump from the current one-year requirement. Inspectors will also have to demonstrate familiarity with relevant laws and rules, and an understanding of facade science. The cost of hiring a qualified inspector to examine a 15-story building might cost \$20,000 to \$30,000 under the proposed rules – up from \$8,000 under the old rules, The new rules would require . . . at least one close-up inspection for every 60 feet of every public right-of-way frontage [resulting in] a tremendous increase in costs for scaffolding and rigging Under the old rules, one close-up inspection was required on every street frontage. Inspectors will have to provide photographic evidence of close-up inspections, in order to eliminate false filings [in the future]. There are also stiffer civil penalties for non-compliance.

The new inspection process would pay especially close attention to . . . [older buildings with] load-bearing masonry wall and brick skin. There is empty space or insulation between the two . . . and the bricks of the skin are supported by metal shelves and secured to the masonry wall with metal ties. Over time, the shelves and ties can degrade and fail. Under the new rules, contractors and inspectors would be required to conduct at least one probe per close-up inspection interval to determine the condition, and number, of ties and shelves.

It's not too late to become involved and ensure that your voice is heard!

The hearing will be held at 10 A.M. on Monday, Dec. 30, 2019 at 280 Broadway (4th floor). Anyone can comment on the proposed rules in the following ways:

- You can submit comments to the DOB through the NYC rules website at <http://rules.cityofnewyork.us>.
- You can email comments to dobrules@buildings.nyc.gov.
- You can fax comments to the New York City Department of Buildings, Office of the General Counsel, at 212-566-3843.
- You can speak at the hearing, provided you sign up in the hearing room before the hearing begins. You will be allowed to speak for up to three minutes.