

# Why “greening” cities can make gentrification worse — and often doesn’t help the environment either



# THE HIGH LINE IN NYC

Created in 2009 and inspired by the Promenade plantée in Paris, the final section of the High Line, known as "the Spur," was completed in 2019. Since then, annual visits to the High Line jumped from 5 million to 8 million people.

A 2020 study of the High Line found that its creation directly led to a 35% increase in home values in the area

## THE SAD IRONY

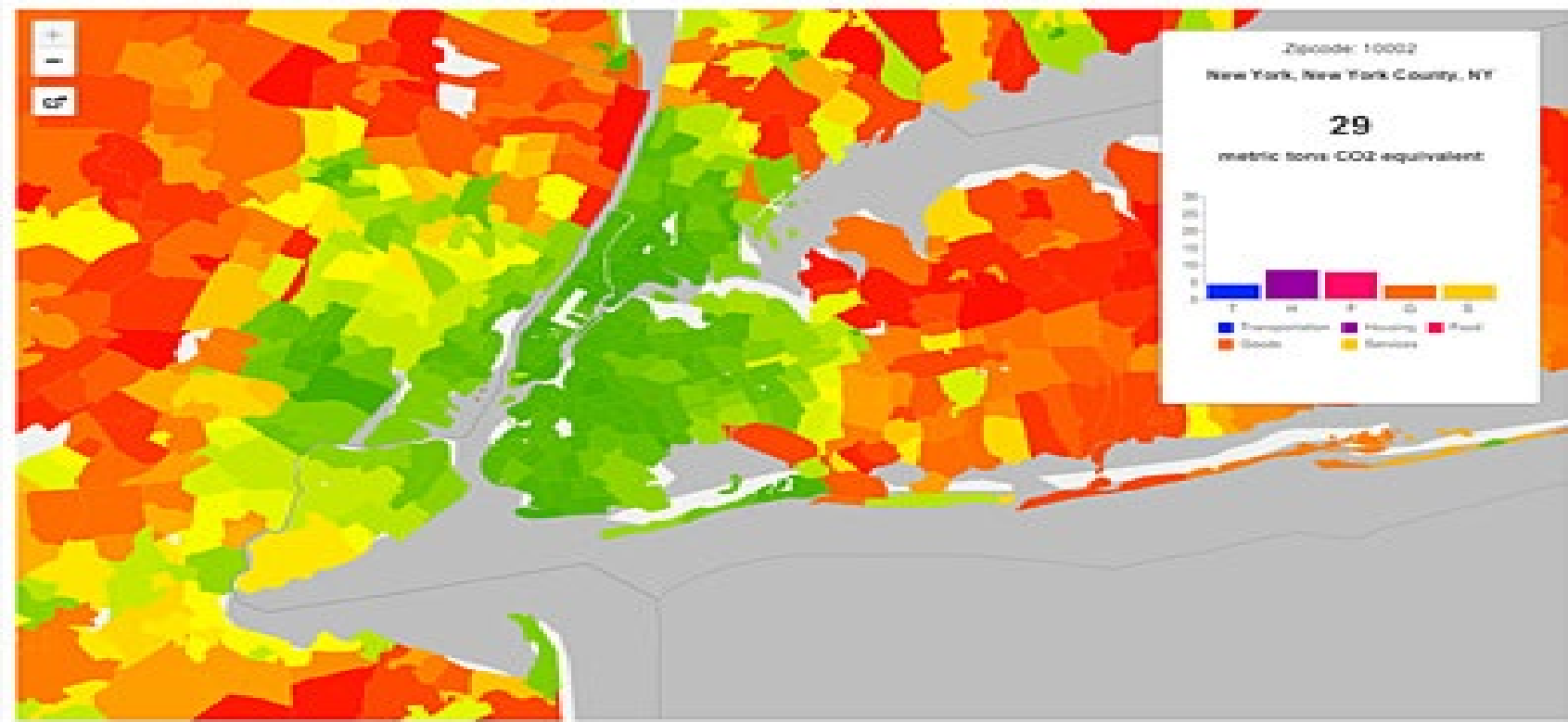
- **Low income communities — and particularly low income communities of color — have far fewer trees and conservation lands in their borders as compared to more affluent communities.**
- **Greater [rates of asthma](#) and other respiratory illnesses.**
- **Lack of tree cover also translates into actual temperature disparities, with poorer neighborhoods [experiencing more sweltering conditions](#) in the summer months and [higher incidences of heatstroke](#).**
- **These are the populations most likely to be displaced (or further excluded) by “greening” projects**

# About Me:

- Grew up in a rent controlled (later rent-stabilized) apt in Sunset Park, Brooklyn (which is an environmental justice community)
- Attended post-graduate and graduate school for conservation biology/natural resources sciences & mgt, conducted research on climate change (was research assistant to the state climatologist), transportation, sustainable agriculture
- Professional background as an environmental advocate and researcher for several nonprofits and government agencies in Washington D.C., Alaska & Massachusetts
- Has been freelancing as an environmental journalist for nearly 20 years
- Due to disability income lowered and lived in affordable housing in the Boston area for nearly 8 years
- More recently became a Section 8 voucher holder

- Green Line extension of the subway for the Union Square section of the City of Somerville were finalized in 2016, property values for that neighborhood have **increased approximately 40 percent**.
- Union Square is home to a large population of Haitian, Brazilian and Latinx communities and cultures that are gradually disappearing with escalating rents.
- In Boston proper, the opening of the Blue Hill Avenue station in Dorchester (a Black-majority neighborhood) as part of the Fairmount Line of the commuter rail ushered **in steep rent increases** of \$300/mo that threaten the ability of long-time residents to remain in the area.

# Suburban sprawl cancels carbon-footprint savings of dense urban cores



# **Contradictions of the Climate-Friendly City: New Perspectives on Eco-Gentrification and Housing Justice**

*"When low income people are pushed further and further out, it increases their emissions for traveling by cars—cars that are often less efficient and emit more [greenhouse gasses],"* says Jennifer Rice, an urban geographer with the University of Georgia.

# Other “Greening” Initiatives That Can Lead to Displacement

- **Mandating harsh parking restrictions or minimums or street parking bans, or landlords demanding tenants cannot own cars.**
- **Building more market rate and luxury development that lead to pricing pressures and send price signals that push lower income people out (displacement by its definition is near term and local—occurring on the neighborhood level).**
- **Emphasizing on smaller units and micro-units, SROs in new developments that can exclude disabled individuals and families (often lower income)**



# Other “Greening” Initiatives That Can Undermine Sustainability

- Developing/urbanizing wetlands, forested lands, ecologically sensitive or vital lands, that offer critical habitat to wildlife and carbon sequestration
- Development in general has a large carbon footprint that can take a decade or decades to offset even when employing sustainable construction materials and promises to be net zero (considering the full Life Cycle Analysis of a given project and its full context)
- Dedicated bus lanes, traffic calming measures that \*may\* contribute to more gridlock/idling and more emissions of car traffic/increased congestion
- Emphasis on high rise over low- and mid-rise

# Massachusetts Community Preservation Act

- Privileges affluent communities over financially disadvantaged ones as it relies on property taxes
- Affluent communities are supposed to expend a minimum of funding on affordable housing (10%) –many are not spending none while investing in other projects, whether greening projects or cultural preservation projects
- Lower income communities cannot access these funds to green their communities and salvage or create more affordable housing to buffer against displacement

# Possible Solutions

- Massive investments in public “green” housing/lower income housing offered for a diversity of family sizes and needs
- More attention paid to buses, extending and improving systems (and for existing train systems); making fully accessible, considering overnight service and comprehensive paratransit, discount and free service
- Expansion of Community Land Trusts
- Expansion of housing vouchers/universal vouchers and increasing payment standards, no fault evictions, more watchdogging of landlords
- RENT CONTROL/STABILIZATION
- Investments in remote work and decreased work weeks
- More out of the box thinking: universal healthcare, UBI, wealth distribution, taxing or seizing vacant units (or more moderate: transfer tax), decommmodifying housing