Inclusionary Zoning and Exclusionary Development: The (Post)-Politics of Affordable Housing in Greenpoint-Williamsburg

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The 2005 rezoning of the Greenpoint-Williamsburg waterfront was not only one of the largest rezonings in New York City history, it was also widely promoted as an historic opportunity for voluntary inclusionary zoning, a city program that allows private developers to increase the density of their market rate projects in exchange for the production or financing of affordable housing. Over eight years after the rezoning, however, far fewer affordable housing units have been generated in Greenpoint and Williamsburg than initially anticipated, and voluntary inclusionary zoning has come under attack from affordable housing advocates across the city. This presentation critically examines the inclusionary zoning program in Greenpoint-Williamsburg as not just Practically ineffective, but politically disabling. Inclusionary zoning, I argue, is an example of what Eric Swyngedouw calls “governance-beyond-the-state” – a regime consisting of state, capital, and civil society actors that has collectively de-politicized housing commodification and residential displacement by reducing these issues to a set of narrow, technocratic questions surrounding “affordable housing.” Central to this ensemble and fully implicated in this technology of governance have been local nonprofits representing “the community.” A recent resurgence of the “housing question”, however, suggests a mounting crisis of the hegemony of the affordable housing regime and points towards a re-politicization of housing in New York City.

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