HT 19: PROVIDE ZONING BONUS FOR INVITING STAIRCASES

New York City Zoning Resolution
Proposal developed by the Health Committee

Summary

Issue:
When stairs are easy to locate, convenient, and attractive they are well used. But in most new buildings, stairs are built as hidden necessities.

Recommendation:
Reward buildings with a zoning bonus for designing stairs that are prominent and accessible.

Proposed Legislation, Rule or Study

Zoning Resolution of the City of New York

Add the following:

12-10 Definitions “Floor Area”

... However the “floor area” of a building shall not include: <Add the following to the list>

Up to 50% of the stair area on any floor where the stairs meet the following criteria:

i) On the main floor: located within 25 ft of and visible from the entrance, OR located and visible BEFORE elevator(s) from entrance, OR adjacent to and visible from at least the main elevator waiting area serving the lowest bank of the building; AND

ii) On all other floors: more prominent than elevator from main path of travel, OR adjacent to and visible from at least the main elevator waiting area, OR visible and accessible from tenant areas; AND

iii) Is 48 inches or wider; AND

iv) Provides daylighting (e.g. extension of the Housing Quality bonus for daylighting in corridors) on each floor if the stair is located at the perimeter of a building and where the perimeter is not along a lot line; AND

v) EITHER

a) is an open interconnecting stair additional to required fire stairs, OR

b) is an open interconnecting stair serving as a fire stair using allowable fire safety systems such as a deluge sprinkler system, OR

c) is an enclosed fire stair made visible and accessible by all of the requirements proposed for Building Code inclusion (see proposals with Health and Physical Activity Committee Ranking 1-3), except that minimum fire-rated transparent glazing used to provide visibility must be at least 50% of the door rather than 1/3 of the door, OR

d) any combination of a, b, and c on different floors.

*Stairs as defined above do not include escalators.

Exceptions:
The zoning bonus will not be granted if escalators are provided along with the best practice stairs or to buildings classified in Group H, High Hazard.
Supporting Information

Issue – Expanded
For additional background see HT15 “Allow Stairway Use”

Stair climbing is a vigorous form of incidental physical activity that can easily be incorporated into the daily lives of most able-bodied people. Stairs, however, are often difficult to locate, inconvenient, unpleasant, and inaccessible. Inclusion of at least one “Public Access Stair” in every building that allows access, is visible, and provides information encouraging stair use is critical for facilitating stair use to help address the urgent obesity crisis in New York City. These very basic and no cost or inexpensive requirements have been proposed for inclusion in the Building Codes. In addition to these basic requirements, however, are design factors, such as stair placement and location, which also play an important role in promoting stair use. Because the latter can be more costly and need to be determined on a case by case basis, these additional design factors should be included in zoning incentives (Floor Area Ratio Exemption).

The purpose of these design features is to make stairs more prominent than, or as prominent as, elevators in terms of placement, visibility, and aesthetics. This will make stairs a truly competitive and viable option compared to elevators for vertical transport of able-bodied persons in a building.

Environmental & Health Benefits
For additional environment and health benefits see HT15 “Allow Stairway Use”

This proposal was found to have a positive, indirect environmental impact.

This proposal was found to have a low positive health impact per building and to impact a small number of buildings. It was thus given a health score of 1.

Cost & Savings
This proposal is for a zoning bonus, and therefore have no direct impact on construction costs.

Precedents
For additional precedents see HT15 “Allow Stairway Use”

Although there are no known precedents for promoting stair use outside of emergency circumstances, precedence for codifying physical-activity promoting design for health purposes exists in building codes elsewhere. The CDC, through its Healthy Workforce Initiative, has proposed several optional steps to increase stair usage. Through a pilot program at the Rhodes Building in Atlanta, Georgia they implemented a stair usage plan that included adding carpeting, artwork and music to the stairwells. The CDC also posted motivational signs near elevators that encouraged people to use the stairs as opposed to the elevator. Additionally, they installed tracking mechanisms to monitor people traveling in the staircase. The entire cost of this plan was $16,000 for the five-story building.

LEED
For LEED information see HT15 “Allow Stairway Use”

Implementation & Market Availability
There are no known implementation issues for this proposal.

ENDNOTES: