The office of comptroller has a special role to place in the fight against climate change. Within the confines of a formerly redlined neighborhood it is not hard to see the urgency with which we must tackle this issue as a community and as a city. Decades of disinvestment and a lack of green space in neighborhoods like Brian’s means that when summer heat rises because of carbon emissions, neighborhoods like Harlem and Brownsville suffer more emergency room visits and deaths from heat stroke. And when infrastructure crumbles and our air or even soil remains polluted, its children in Highbridge and East Harlem that end up with record high rates of asthma hospitalizations.

In fact, formerly redlined neighborhoods in New York City are on average 5 degrees hotter in the summer than other neighborhoods, creating a deadly urban heat island effect. The New York City Department of Health tracks this in a “Heat Vulnerability Index,” and as the below map shows, the red line map of Upper Manhattan drawn more than 80 years ago still fits neatly over the current heat vulnerability index map. This is true for the rest of the city, as well.

Red lining maps were drawn in the 1930s by the federal government to guide housing investments and they continue to have disastrous effects on communities of color. (Continued next page)
CLIMATE AND SUSTAINABILITY Introduction (continued)

The notes on New York City’s redline maps indicate that some areas, though composed of identical housing stock, received different colors because of the racial composition of the neighborhoods. As a result, private AND public funds were steered away from some neighborhoods and towards others. This is why today some communities have an abundance of open space, trees, and corridors to absorb heat and carbon emissions, while others not only lack that but also became dumping grounds for toxins related to fossil fuels and industry. As a result of disinvestment, these same communities also experienced lower building quality that led to peeling lead paint and other dangerous environmental situations. This, combined with the other factors such as heat, contributes to the higher rates of asthma in formerly redlined Black and Brown communities here in New York City.

The results in an inequitable city, with different housing stock, different heat levels, and even different levels of health and wellness. We have seen the decades-long results of environmental racism play out in the COVID-19 pandemic, where Black and Brown communities have been hit the hardest by the coronavirus because of preexisting conditions directly linked to the legacy of redlining and the present impacts of climate change.

This is the threat of climate change as we feel it here and now most presently—we can’t address it by keeping these neighborhoods at the center of the solution. As a father who is raising a little girl in Harlem, Brian has both the skills and the lived experience to meet these challenges head on.

Move on From Fossil Fuels

In January, Brian celebrated the decision of three of the five pension funds to divest from fossil fuels. This decision was made by the labor trustees after careful consideration of the returns, and it was the right thing to do. Divesting is necessary, but that doesn’t mean it will be easy. Brian currently sits on the board of Brown University, which divested from fossil fuels while making excellent returns for the endowment. Brian will use the same skills he brings to the Brown University board to the pension fund to help guide the city out of fossil fuel divestment while still protecting the retirees benefits and ensuring the city will not have to shovel more money into the pensions to keep them solvent, syphoning precious budget dollars away from social services.

Brian will also work with the labor trustees who control the pension funds to make investments that meet the very best environmental, social and corporate governance (ESG) standards. The fact is this: green investing is good investing, and Brian will use his many years of financial experience to make decisions and deals to ensure we all benefit from these critical investments.

These investments and divestments are most meaningful if New York City and State’s capital spending backs them up. Brian will continue to support historic investments in green infrastructure so we can transition our union workers from building fossil fuel infrastructure to building the facilities we need to build a 21st century city. Today, more than 150,000 New Yorkers are at work at clean energy jobs, and Brian will use the office of comptroller to ensure that this work is done at a fair prevailing wage and that services are provided by M/WBE contractors. This work includes purchasing electric and hybrid vehicles whenever possible, even if it costs slightly more in the short term. New York City has a goal to completely electrify its fleet by 2040, and Brian will ensure we meet or exceed this goal. These are investments in our future, and we cannot afford to be penny wise and pound foolish. Brian’s audits will measure performance with this in mind.
### Sustainability Audits

Brian knows that to really measure the success of New York City we need to look at more than dollars and cents. That’s because agencies reaching goals in the way that is most impactful to New Yorkers like you isn’t always going to be reflected in the bottom line. To ensure that every agency and program that the city runs is not only fiscally sound but is also working towards building a city that New Yorkers deserve to live in, every audit performed by Brian’s office will also include a sustainability audit and an equity audit. This intersects our climate change goals in the three-part sustainability audit, which looks at climate change, emergency preparedness, and innovation.

For climate change, Brian will measure each program or agency’s success in meeting the goals in OneNYC2050, New York City’s sustainability master plan. This plan lays out how we can build a greener, fairer, and stronger city that is ready to face the future, including the climate crisis. An audit with climate change in mind will allow Brian to make the moral and monetary case for some of our most important green goals, including:

- **Making New York City a zero-waste city.** Our current waste collection system puts too much organic waste into landfills, leading to dangerous methane emissions, poisoning our air and hastening the disastrous impacts of climate change. By investing in organic waste composting and ensuring our city’s recycling system is well funded, we can avoid these effects! Brian will also measure the Department of Sanitation’s compliance with Commercial Waste Zones and Local Law 199 to ensure our commercial waste collection system advances our zero-waste goals. This will help reduce commercial waste, incentivize recycling, and also reduce truck traffic that leads to harmful emissions.

- **Making New York City a green transportation city.** Brian will measure the MTA / NYCTA’s progress building bus infrastructure and bike lanes to allow New Yorkers in every neighborhood the opportunity to take public transit to work. Brian will also measure each agency’s compliance with their own plans and the city’s overall goals to convert fleets to hybrid and electric vehicles and ensure that congestion pricing is implemented as efficiently as possible. More than 30% of the greenhouse gas emissions in New York City come from transportation. We also need to upgrade our local port infrastructure to be more sustainable.

- **Making New York City a green energy city.** We need to build our own public infrastructure for green energy and incentivize the creation of private green energy infrastructure as well! That means everything to solar rooftops on new affordable housing to an expanded green grid for public utilities. Wherever this is possible, this economic development needs to be paired with workforce development, providing training for local communities so that they can be a part of improving their own neighborhoods and, more broadly, the jobs of the future. This model was successfully used by WE ACT in their SUN (Solar Uptown Now) program.

- **Make New York City’s infrastructure equitable.** Far too often, polluting infrastructure like Astoria’s peaker plant and Harlem’s waste treatment plant on the Hudson River are in working class or minority communities. When new infrastructure of this nature absolutely must be built, Brian will push to ensure that it is built in an equitable manner. Brian will also push to remove and adapt the infrastructure so that we can make a just transition to a cleaner, greener city.

All of these goals have high, positive impacts on our city’s finances and our city’s livability, and Brian will aggressively track them all as Comptroller.

Brian’s audits will also include two measurements specifically aimed at **building a resilient city.** First, agencies’ readiness to deal with emergencies near and far will be examined. This will include ensuring that emergency procedures are in place for dealing with future disasters like pandemics and also a review of what measures are being taken to deal with the emergencies brought on by greater and more frequent weather events we are experiencing as a result of climate change. Far too often, the response to emergencies (Continued next page)
**Sustainability Audits (continued)**

like hurricanes only looks at downtown Manhattan. In reality, it is residents of Brooklyn, Queens, and Staten Island who bear the brunt of these disasters. Brian will ensure agencies are preparing to defend every New York family and business, no matter the zip code. Second, Brian’s office will look at community engagement, measuring how the city is engaging stakeholders. New Yorkers rely on the expertise of the public servants in our workforce, but we can all be better served if we add the local expertise of everyday New Yorkers when implementing new programs and ideas. After every disaster, lookbacks tell us that the city needs to build out plans to connect New Yorkers with relevant agencies, ensure that people check on their neighbors, that neighborhoods have diverse sets of resources at hand, and that volunteers are at the ready when disaster strikes. But these connections are just as important in a time of calm as they are in a time of disaster. What look like relatively weak ties are actually what make New York City strong, and every agency should be investing in by engaging with stakeholders and residents as frequently as possible. Both preparedness and community connections are a necessary part of a truly resilient city.¹

Importantly, the result of these audits and the other components of Brian’s equity and sustainability will be made available to New York City residents on the comptroller’s website and in the city’s Open Data Portal. This will help guide policy makers and elected officials in their decision making for a just transition, but also provide an important layer of accountability for the general public.

**Bringing Our Values to the Boardroom**

With decades of financial experience, Brian knows how to use the muscle that the roughly $240 billion of pension investments bring to not only deliver good returns for retirees, but also improve the city they and their families live in. With our partners in labor, Brian will work aggressively with other pension funds to steer the companies we are invested in towards greener, fairer policies that preserve the health of our city. When this is done actively and aggressively, it gives working people a seat at the table with some of the biggest banks and investment funds. Even when divestment isn’t an option, our investments give us the opportunity to shape the future of the companies we are shareholders in. With strong leadership at the head of funds’, shareholder activism has saved good union jobs, changed board compositions, and transformed companies. It is a major opportunity that is often overlooked and it’s a focal point in Brian’s campaign. If elected, Brian will bring the knowledge and experience to the table that will allow us to use it to the fullest extent possible.

**Get Where You Need to Go, Green!**

New York City is a city on the go. But it is much easier to “go green” if you live in some neighborhoods than in others. Where Brian’s parents live in Queens, the only feasible transportation to Manhattan is a walk to a lengthy bus ride before being able to access the train. Those who can afford to must take a cab to the train in order to make it to work on time. Others don’t bother with the bus or the train—they drive into work every day.

More efficient commutes via express bus lanes, etc must be addressed if we want to equitably cut down on carbon emissions in our city. **We need an approach that ensures that the public, green transportation infrastructure we are building throughout the city meets the needs of our residents, and erases existing disparities.** (Continued next page)

¹ For more on Brian’s Sustainability and Equity Audits visit Benjamin2021.com/plans
Get Where You Need to Go, Green! (continued)

Brian will measure the following programs and push for equal implementation to ensure that every community has equal opportunity to choose green transportation in New York City.

◆ Expanded bus lanes can readily meet the needs of New Yorkers of all kinds who need to travel long distances to make it to work, study, worship, and visit family and friends. The MTA’s “Better Buses” provide a safe and sustainable alternative to car travel that Brian will push for in every community to ensure that every community has equal opportunity to choose public transportation over a car ride.

◆ A US Department of Transportation study showed that the fastest rate of growth in biking was in Black, Hispanic and Asian communities. A bike lane map of New York City makes it clear that our bike infrastructure is not meeting those needs. The key to this problem is a lack of community engagement. Safe, protected bike lanes are a key to a green New York City, and to meet this need, Brian will use his Equity Audits to ensure that future transportation programs include the community engagement necessary to make sure that this infrastructure is built in ways that make sense in every community.

◆ An important part of moving on from fossil fuels is creating the electric charging stations necessary for privately owned electric vehicles, but currently far too many of New York City’s publicly available electric charging stations are concentrated in Manhattan’s business district. To change this, Brian will:

  • Track where tax incentives to build new charging stations are directed and encourage spending in higher need neighborhoods;
  
  • Ensure that any charging station that is built with public dollars through federal, state or city tax incentives is truly publicly available, and;
  
  • Push agencies like the Parks Department to make all their charging stations available to the public at cost to increase access to this infrastructure in high need neighborhoods.

◆ New York City’s expanded electric fleet of vehicles presents an opportunity for a pilot program that Brian will support and encourage as Comptroller that can both reduce public reliance on fossil fuels and create revenue for the city. Agencies currently report that New York City’s fleet is used roughly 92% of the time, but some of that use is not for the entirety of the day. Brian will work with agencies to measure that gap in day use and encourage them close the gap by:

  • Reducing use of cars to save agency spending;
  
  • Reducing use of cars by sharing cars between agencies and with members of the public who are participating in a pilot program.

Broadly, Brian believes that whenever transportation infrastructure is being repaired, purchased or built, the NYC Department of Transportation and other agencies need to include green measures in their work. Studies have shown that choices as simple as the color of the street can have a dramatic impact on the heat or environmental quality of a neighborhood.
A Green Land Bank

New York needs to act quickly to address the climate crisis, and it needs to pay special attention to the Black and brown communities that are bearing the brunt of climate change’s impact. As Comptroller, Brian will use one of the city’s underutilized resources to tackle this issue while also proposing investments in affordable and green / sustainable housing to fight the affordable housing crisis: vacant land.

New York City currently possesses more than a thousand lots of vacant land which can be utilized to build a more sustainable city. By actively tracking this resource as well as commercial and residential lots that are underutilized and have remained permanently in a tax delinquent status, Brian will work with city agencies to find green uses that city agencies and the community can invest in. These uses include:

◆ Keeping a strategic number of these lots vacant in key areas and converting them into permanent green space that is available to the residents of the city. Many of these vacant lots are already doing important work if the ground is permeable and wild plants are growing, but opening the area up to a simple community garden would improve this. Roadways, parking lots, buildings and other covered surfaces trap and amplify heat. In contrast, green space with uncovered earth, greenery, and trees to provide shade cool down the areas that surround them. The result is that areas that lack permanently preserved green spaces become “heat islands,” and as climate change increases summer temperatures, the threat of summer heat in these areas grows. New York measures this threat with its Heat Vulnerability Index (HVI), and Brian will ensure that existing open space in areas that have a high HVI rating are kept open or converted to permanently green space. Green space also offers an important, restorative retreat from the bustle of city life, and can be a plus for mental health.

◆ Create simple working green infrastructure for the city that can even help take some of the burden off our aging sewer system. New York City’s sewer city uses one collection system for rain and waste. This means that heavy rain causes an overflow of waste into local waterways that is incredibly dangerous to our environment. By including permanent permeable space or every preserving part of the space as a rain garden or infiltration basin, we can help prevent this. But this can only be done if this resource is tracked across agencies!

La Casita Community Garden, East Harlem. Source www.nyrp.org
A Green Land Bank (continued)

◆ Build affordable and sustainable housing to fight both climate change and the affordable housing crisis. These builds could be financed by either HPD, investments from the pension funds, or partnerships with public development depending on the need in the particular community. This housing can include green space to fight urban heat both with open space on lots. Even when large amounts of open space is not possible, green roofs to provide the benefits of greenery and blue roofs which retain stormwater can help preserve our environment.

◆ Use this land for the creation of more complex green infrastructure necessary for a truly green city, including citing for public utilities, green energy generation, energy storage, and more.

◆ Make the land available for urban agriculture, shown to create a healthier relationship with food. By placing residents in direct contact with the source of their food, urban agriculture has been shown to encourage “food sovereignty.” This has both direct nutritional and far-reaching social benefits, reshaping connections not only by providing city residents with the food they directly produce, but also impacting how city residents feel about food in general. Particularly in neighborhoods with food deserts, these opportunities allow city residents to redefine how they think about food from a negative, consumer / producer mindset to a nutritional and sustaining mindset, which can allow for healthier patterns of consumption elsewhere and form a sense of ownership over one’s food consumption in general. Queens, which public records show to have the highest number of city owned vacant lots, also includes many residents living in food deserts. These are ideal communities to encourage the development of urban agriculture within, and Brian will ensure that relevant agencies are considering these options in each of his audits.

◆ Brian, who fought for the closure of Rikers Island early in his tenure in the senate, also supports the Renewable Rikers plan. This plan would ensure that the 400-acres that the correctional facility currently sits on is turned to a public good, housing the green infrastructure our city needs to be a truly 21st century city.

Highlights From Brian’s Record on the Environment

◆ Wrote and sponsored a bill to give New York its own, gold standard lead standard

◆ Co-Sponsored the Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act

◆ Co-Sponsored the Climate and Community Investment Act to fund the Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act