The Promises and Perils of Racial Equity Planning
Outline

Definition
Background and Justification
Examples
Perils & Promise
Conclusion
• Racial equity analysis or planning is the use of planning studies that explicitly consider whether there are disparate impacts by race/ethnicity resulting from planning actions.

• The logic behind racial equity analyses is analogous to that which underlies regulations requiring Environmental Impact Statements (EIS).
Justification

**Reparative**
- Making amends for past injustices due to planning

**Equity**
- Racial inequality is persistent in many cities
Reparative Justifications

• From the 1910s to the 1960s, several public policies and planning practices were adopted to create and reinforce patterns of residential segregation and disadvantage in communities of color.
Reparative Justifications

- Racial Zoning
- Enforcement of Restrictive Covenants
- Redlining
- Segregated Public Housing
- Construction of Interstate Highway System
- Implementation of Urban Renewal
- Disproportionate siting of environmental hazards in communities of color
Persistent Racial Inequities

- Residential segregation although declining remains high
- Persons of color disproportionately impacted by concentrated poverty

![Residential Segregation with Whites in NYC](chart)
“Race Neutral” policies have Racial Impact

- Large lot requirements, restrictions on multi-family housing and other types of exclusionary land use regulations disproportionately exclude people of color.
- In New York City early 21st century upzoning occurred disproportionately in low-income neighborhoods which are disproportionately communities of color.
Persistent Racial Inequality Translate into New Inequities

• Fallout from Financial Crisis of 2008
• Hurricane Sandy
• Covid Pandemic

New York Renters in Covid Hot Spots Are Four Times More Likely to Face Eviction
An analysis of court data shows that the areas hit hardest by the virus, largely Black and Latino neighborhoods, have the most eviction cases.
Planning & Racial Equity

• The Fair Housing Act and Civil Rights Legislation outlawed discrimination

• Will a “race neutral” approach achieve racial equity?
Logic of Environmental Impact Statement

- Unbridled development since the late 19th century left America with polluted waterways, unclean air, and spoiled landscapes.
- A *laissez-faire* approach to development would not protect the environment.
- Environmental Impact Statements are one tool to ensure that new developments consider impacts on the environment.
New York City Racial Equity Law: 2021

In June 2021, New York City adopted a law requiring racial equity reports for rezonings that substantially alter allowable floor areas, historic district designations, or zoning variances.

These reports are mandated to consider the area's

- demographic conditions
- quality of life
- housing security
- displacement risk

The law also directs the Department of City Planning to collect and make available data to facilitate such analyses.
Case: Gowanus Neighborhood Plan

- Analyzed Existing Conditions
  - Local economy
  - Housing Patterns
- Simulation of impact of proposed development
  - Disaggregated impacts by race/ethnicity
  - Impacts on residential segregation
- Concluded that proposed project would reduce racial inequities large due to inclusionary housing component
Racial Equity Examples

Seattle

Seattle 2035 Equity Analysis

Overview
The City of Seattle is updating its Comprehensive Plan to guide how the City will grow and what kind of city we want to be. The City has released a Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) evaluating four growth alternatives.

How can we grow while making sure everyone has what they need to succeed and thrive?
Throughout Seattle's history, some populations and neighborhoods have prospered at the expense of others as a result of racially discriminatory public policies. While social equity has been a core value of the Comprehensive Plan since its adoption in 1984, the City's Race and Social Justice Initiative (RSJI) did not exist until 2005.

We have prepared an Equity Analysis to identify how growth may benefit or burden marginalized populations. This analysis will inform potential strategies to lessen impacts and maximize opportunity for marginalized populations.

How did we conduct the Equity Analysis?
The analysis evaluated existing conditions, analyzed potential impacts of each alternative, and identified solutions with an eye toward the following questions:

- Are different distributions of growth more or less likely to displace marginalized populations and/or affect their access to opportunity?
- What strategies and investments are necessary to address the impacts of growth and maximize opportunities for equitable development?

Key Terms
- Marginalized populations: Low-income people, people of color, and English language learners
- Access to opportunity: The services, amenity, and other key determinants of social, economic, and physical well-being
- Displacement: The involuntary relocation of marginalized populations from their current neighborhood
- Equitable development: Public and private neighborhood investments, programs, and policies to meet the needs of marginalized populations and reduce disparities

Boston

Housing

Overview
Inclusionary Development Policy: Annual Reports
Inclusionary Development Policy Update
Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing Article 80
Frequently Asked Questions
Income, Asset, and Price Limits
Finding Housing
Existing Tenants & Owners
Developers
Property Managers
Artist Live/Work Program
The Promise

Primum non nocere

- Major land use decisions would now be cognizant of the potential impact on historically marginalized populations

The racial equity benefits of some contested land use proposals (e.g. Gowanus Neighborhood Plan) would be apparent, perhaps garnering political support.
Over time the expectation that major projects will undergo review for racial equity may influence the types of projects that are built. Developers, planners and other shapers of the built environment can apply creativity to design and plan developments that advance the cause of racial equity.
Limits to Racial Equity Planning

• Will not address inequities that arise in other domains
  • Schools
  • Job market
• By itself, will not undo high levels of residential segregation
• Will not erase the racial wealth gap/homeownership gap
The Perils

• Requiring racial equity analyses could add to regulatory burden

• Land use regulations have been linked to higher housing costs

• *Neighborhood Defenders* documents how review processes for land use decisions are used to stymie development in Massachusetts
Too Much Regulation or Not enough Planning?

Outdated inflexible code

- New development is proposed
- Community Input is required
  - Project is delayed
  - Project is stopped
  - Project not proposed at all

Flexible Up to Date Plan

- Community Input
  - New development is proposed
  - New development is built
Conclusion

• For reasons of reparative justice and persistent racial inequality racial equity planning is emerging as a tool.

• The use of racial equity planning has the promise to go beyond race neutrality and move our cities toward racial equity.