



De Blasio hints at 'vacancy fee' for landlords of empty storefronts

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Some storefronts remain empty for months or years as landlords wait to sink high-paying tenants

By Zoe Rosenberg | @zoe_rosenberg | Apr 2, 2018, 3:16pm EDT



Photo by Spencer Platt/Getty Images

Mayor Bill de Blasio has been largely noncommittal on speaking about how the city can combat some of the blight that's sweeping New York's retail corridors, but that may soon change.

On his Friday spot on WNYC, the mayor alluded that retail vacancy has been on the brain (h/t [NY Post](#)). "I am very interested in fighting for a vacancy fee or a vacancy tax that would penalize landlords who leave their storefronts vacant for long periods of time in neighborhoods because they are looking for some top-dollar rent but they blight neighborhoods by doing it," he said. "That is something we could get done through Albany."

The mayor's office said the initiative is in the planning phase.

Manhattan Borough President Gale Brewer has been active in suggesting legislation that would help combat retail blight. Brewer has spearheaded an effort to create a bill that would offer commercial

tenants an automatic one-year extension on expiring leases and mandate negotiations between landlord and tenant, a proposal that Brewer said De Blasio has “expressed interest” in.

The Village’s Bleecker Street has become one of the starkest examples of retail blight in the city. A report released by State Senator Brad Hoylman in 2017 called “Bleaker on Bleecker” illustrates why small businesses are faltering: “Instead of renting to another independent business for a similar rent as the previous tenant, landlords will hold out for a tenant—often a large corporate chain—that is able to pay exponentially more than the previous tenant.”

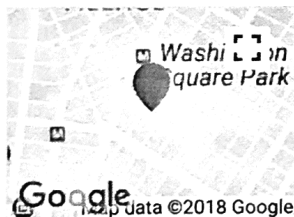
Those tenants, however, aren’t coming. “There is, to me, a very sweet irony in the fact that all these chain stores that basically decimated local retail, decimated main streets across America, they are now the stores that are the most on the ropes because of Amazon,” Vishaan Chakrabarti, of PAU, told Karrie Jacobs in her look into the state of mom-and-pop shops in New York in 2017.

Recent studies quoted by the *New York Post* say 27 percent of Upper West Side storefronts along Amsterdam Avenue are vacant with a stretch of Broadway in Soho sporting 20 percent vacancy. Five percent or less is considered “healthy,” the *Post* says.

A City Council report published in December says that Manhattan’s overall retail vacancy rate has doubled between 2012 and 2017, from 2.1 to 4.2 percent.

The city doesn’t currently keep track of retail vacancies, but the City Council is considering requiring property owners with vacant commercial space to register it in an official database.

- De Blasio eyes vacancy tax for greedy landlords seeking top-dollar [NYP]
- The death and life of mom-and-pops [Curbed]



Bleecker Street

Bleecker Street, Manhattan, NY