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City wants to cut down supertalls

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The de Blasio administration is taking aim at developers' practice of stacking luxury condos atop multistory hollow spaces to achieve greater heights and more lucrative sales.

Marisa Lago, chairwoman of the City Planning Commission, said at a town hall meeting last month that her office is working to change how it treats such large voids, which do not count against a building's density limit. Limiting their size could shrink the height of future towers.

"The notion that there are empty spaces for the sole purpose of making the building taller for the views at the top is not what was intended" by the zoning code, she said. "We are already working under the mayor's direction with the Department of Buildings to see how we can make sure that the intent of the rules is followed."

Putting **a building on stilts** is a common gambit used by developers of very tall luxury condo towers to boost a project's height yet comply with existing zoning. It works because floors for mechanical equipment are exempt from the limits. By stretching the ceiling of one or more mechanical floors to dizzying heights, developers can essentially create a pedestal upon which to stack the priciest units.

"We have a building on 62nd Street that we have challenged ... that has **a 100-foot, floor-to-floor void** in the middle," Rachel Levy, executive director of the Friends of the Upper East Side, said at the town hall.

How the city will close the loophole remains unclear. The Buildings Department repeatedly has signed off on the voids, ruling that they do not violate the zoning code. To change things, staff members could alter their interpretation of the code, or the city could simply rewrite the rules.

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