



[OPINION](#)

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Op-Ed

## **The keys to keeping NYC competitive**

### **The city's growth will require innovation, creativity and investment to be sustainable**

By Richard Florida, Hugh F. Kelly, Steven Pedigo and Rosemary Scanlon

In the past 15 years, New York City has endured the devastating attacks of 9/11, two recessions, a Wall Street crisis that nearly annihilated the global economy and a catastrophic storm that wiped out billions of dollars in infrastructure. Despite it all, the city has bounced back—a testament to the vitality that is, to a great degree, a product of its economic and demographic diversity.

To better understand how the city's economy has evolved since the Great Recession, we examined economic and demographic trends and interviewed nearly 60 city leaders during the past year. Our report published Wednesday, "New York City: The Great Reset," reveals our findings. Though there is much to celebrate, not all the news is good. The recovery has been disturbingly uneven, and unless substantial investments are made in the city's human and physical capital, we believe that its ability to remain globally competitive will be severely compromised.

Over the next 35 years, New York City will add at least 600,000 new residents. Though there are more housing options than are commonly recognized, large parts of the city are threatening to become as unaffordable as London is today. [Mayor Bill de Blasio's 10-year housing plan](#) is a start in addressing this issue, but much more needs to be done.

The good news is that the city can afford to make the required investments. Revenue from taxes on property, sales and personal income more than meet its operational needs. Thanks in large part to the vitality of its real estate industry and other growing, high-end economic sectors, the city has the means to build a better foundation for growth.

The investments it should make can be grouped into two broad categories. The first is human capital. Today, 1.2 million New Yorkers are paid [minimum wage](#), which is just \$8.75 per hour.

A citywide minimum wage of \$15 per hour, indexed to the local CPI measure maintained by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, should be adopted. This week's news that New York's Wage Board has cleared the way on a \$15 minimum wage for fast-food workers is a step in the right direction.

Furthermore, the city needs to make the same kinds of investments in the training and skills of its retail, food service and health care workers as it does for traditional small businesses and high-tech startups. Numerous programs teach computer coding or make internships and STEM scholarships available to promising public-school students, but only half of New York City's 300,000 technology jobs are held by college graduates.

Nontechnology jobs at high-tech companies, as well as technology-related jobs at nontech companies, also can provide on-ramps to high-paying careers. The city's high schools and community colleges can do much more in the way of practical training for careers in growing industries.

In the realm of physical capital, one reason housing is so expensive is because it clusters around transit hubs and there just aren't enough of them in the outer boroughs. If new subway lines, such as the one proposed by the mayor for Utica Avenue, are unlikely to be built in the near future, existing transit assets should be leveraged much more aggressively than they are.

More dedicated bus lanes can be installed on wide boulevards with stops at high-traffic subway connections, and new bus routes can be established to serve transit-deficient neighborhoods. Bus and train schedules can be adjusted to provide faster service by including more skip-stop express runs, and "smart" buses that can be summoned online can supplement regularly scheduled buses in out-of-the-way neighborhoods.

Ride-sharing and bike-sharing can be expanded, as can programs such as TransitChek and CityTicket. The Port Authority's recent proposal to cut overnight PATH service is a step in precisely the wrong direction—this is a 24-hour city. Mr. de Blasio's announcement of expanded express bus service in his [2015 State of the City speech](#) is a good beginning.

Given the growing gap between median rents and median wages, direct assistance to renters in the forms of tax rebates or direct subsidies will be required, not only for the nonworking and underemployed, but for households with combined incomes as high as the low six figures.

Private "land trusts" can be established to buy out landlords in underutilized neighborhoods. This will provide continuity for local businesses and residents as the city's demand profile gradually shifts and will allow for leasing of the sites to builders of high-density, affordable, walk-to-work housing.

As resilient as New York may be, this is no time for complacency. The city needs to improve its capacities across the whole spectrum of services—from housing and education to communications and transportation—so that all New Yorkers may benefit from the city's growth and success, thereby setting an example for cities across the nation and around the globe. All of the above suggestions can be acted upon immediately. They are both a call to action and an invitation to our colleagues in every sector of civic life to join us in this important discussion.

*Richard Florida, Hugh F. Kelly, Steven Pedigo and Rosemary Scanlon are faculty members at the NYU School of Professional Studies.*