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Ethel Sheffer is Principal of Insight Associates, which for many years has provided advice and research services in planning and land use, community organization and development, the public review process, and collaborations among government, nonprofits and the private sector. She has completed numerous studies for developers and nonprofits in communities as diverse as the West Bronx, East Harlem, Upper West Side, Downtown Brooklyn, Sunset Park, Flushing, Queens, Washington Heights, Times Square, SoHo, and Lower Manhattan.

She has taught for many years in the Graduate School of Architecture, Preservation and Planning at Columbia University where she has supervised a variety of planning studios on public housing in East Harlem, disaster planning in the Rockaways, restoration of the Harlem River waterfront in the Bronx, redevelopment of the former St. Vincent's Medical Center site in Greenwich Village, and post-hurricane planning for vulnerable populations in Gowanus, Brooklyn. In 2020, she supervised a major Capstone Studio for the 125th Business Improvement District in the School of International and Public Affairs.

She served as President of the NY Metro Chapter of the American Planning Association from 2002-2008 and was named a National Fellow in 2012. She is a member of Manhattan Community Board 7 and has served as Chairperson of Community Board 7, the Tri-Board Task Force on Columbus Circle, the Riverside Center Working Group, and the Task Force on Zoning 96th Street-110th Street. She now serves as a Commissioner on the New York City Public Design Commission. Ethel has an MA from Columbia University and is ABD there, and a BA from Brooklyn College. She is a member of the AICP College of Fellows.