



## **Habitat for Humanity – New York City Advocacy E-Newsletter**

November-December 2005 (Issue No. 13)

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### **1. The 2004-2005 Housing Covenant: Mission Accomplished!**

With the November 7 announcement of a third New York/New York agreement, which will commit \$1 billion in city and state funds to build supportive housing, all three of the policy initiatives highlighted in Habitat-NYC's 2004-2005 Housing Covenant have been accomplished. The last year also saw the passage of Intro 22, which protects against housing discrimination in the city, and the adoption of inclusionary zoning agreements in three growing neighborhoods.

In January, we will launch the 2006 Covenant Campaign, highlighting three new policy initiatives to advance the cause of housing justice at the city, state, and federal level. We believe that with the support of our dedicated network of advocates, the goals of the 2006 Covenant will meet with the same success!

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### **2. City Housing News**

#### **Mayor Bloomberg heads into second term**

The need for affordable housing is foremost in the minds of many New Yorkers, and housing advocates succeeded in making it one of the top issues in the mayoral race. In the weeks preceding his re-election, Mayor Bloomberg announced several major policy initiatives on housing and homelessness. The mayor:

- Committed to expanding his affordable-housing plan to build and preserve 165,000 units.

- Established a fund in partnership with private foundations to finance developers of affordable housing.
- Announced the New York/New York III agreement, which will commit the city and state to invest in the creation of thousands of units of supportive housing.

We look forward to seeing these promises fulfilled; as the mayor heads into his second term, supporters of these initiatives will now be holding him and other city leaders accountable for making good on their campaign pledges.

A recent article in the Gotham Gazette describes the election as a win for housing advocates: <http://www.gothamgazette.com/article/housing/20051122/10/1662>

### **The race for City Council Speaker**

Members of the City Council will elect a new Speaker in January, replacing Gifford Miller, who is leaving the City Council because of term limits. Although the public has no official role in electing the speaker, there has been an unprecedented effort this year to bring the race out into the open, and a number of public forums and debates have been held between the seven declared candidates.

On November 30, Habitat-NYC joined other members of the advocacy coalition Housing Here and Now for a public forum on housing issues. Four of the candidates were in attendance: Bill de Blasio (District 39, Brooklyn), Christine Quinn (3, Manhattan), Joel Rivera (15, Bronx), and David Weprin (23, Queens). All of them said that if elected speaker, they would work to pass the Healthy Homes Act promptly, sponsor legislation that would require developers to make one-third of their units affordable to low and moderate-income families in order to qualify for tax breaks, and put pressure on the state legislature to restore the city's authority over NYC rent regulations.

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## **3. State Housing News**

### **The New York/New York III agreement**

On the eve of the mayoral election, Mayor Bloomberg and Governor Pataki announced the third New York/New York agreement, which will devote \$1 billion in city and state funds to build supportive housing for high-risk homeless families and individuals. The historic agreement will create 9,000 new units of supportive housing in NYC over the next 10 years; combined with 3,000 units that the city has already committed to building, will increase the stock of supportive housing in the city by nearly 50%.

Supportive housing is permanent housing with on-site support services for homeless individuals with mental illness and homeless families with special needs. It enables homeless individuals with mental illness and other disabilities to achieve better health, improved job prospects, and more stable lives — all for nearly the same cost to taxpayers as remaining homeless. Mayor Bloomberg announced his support for a third New York/New York agreement in 2004, but the plan could not proceed until Governor Pataki committed the state's portion of the funding.

This agreement is the product of a long, hard fight by advocates, and we thank all of our supporters who have worked to make it a reality.

To read more about supportive housing and about the advocacy campaign that brought about New York/New York III, visit the sites of the Supportive Housing Network of New York and the Coalition for the Homeless:

<http://www.shnny.org>

<http://www.coalitionforthehomeless.org/spotlight/NYNYIII.html>

### **The 2006 race for governor**

In recent weeks, the 2006 gubernatorial election has increasingly been the focus of public and media attention. Governor Pataki announced over the summer that he will not seek re-election, and several candidates have already entered the field.

On the Democratic side, Attorney General Eliot Spitzer is widely seen as the front-runner. Spitzer was the first candidate to enter the race and has already received the support of several state and local Democrats. More recently, Tom Suozzi, the Nassau County executive, has signaled that he also intends to run for governor, challenging Spitzer in a primary election. The Republican field is more crowded. William Weld, the former governor of Massachusetts, has the support of Governor Pataki. Facing him in a primary are Randy Daniels, secretary of state under Governor Pataki, and former State Assemblyman John Faso. Tom Golisano, the Buffalo Sabres owner, also appears poised to enter the race; Golisano has run for governor three times before, most recently in 2002.

Most of the gubernatorial candidates have limited track records and have said little about their positions on housing issues. In his capacity as attorney general, Spitzer has fought discrimination by real estate brokers, developers, and mortgage brokers, and investigated fraudulent practices by home improvement contractors. He has not stated whether he supports repealing the Urstadt Law, which granted the state legislature control over rent regulations.

In suburban Nassau County, Suozzi has promoted a plan for “smart growth” that includes more affordable housing for young workers and seniors. He has also committed federal housing assistance funds to help first-time homebuyers make down payments.

As governor of Massachusetts, Weld implemented a rule denying shelter to families evicted due to nonpayment of rent. He also stated strong opposition to rent regulation, promising in 1994 to veto an effort to restore rent controls in Boston and Cambridge, and he demoted the state Department of Housing and Community Development from Cabinet status.

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## **4. Federal Housing News**

### **Section 8 vouchers and Community Development Block Grants face cuts**

The budget for the Department of Housing and Urban Development for fiscal year 2006 has passed through Congress and been signed into law. The budget as passed eliminates funding for more than 70,000 Housing Choice (“Section 8” vouchers nationally, including 5,000 from New York State. It also decreases funding for the Community Development Block Grant program by more than \$3 billion, including \$35 million for New York State. These programs could be cut further if Congress votes to enact an across-the-board spending cut of 1 or 2 percent. Analysis of the threatened cuts is available through the National Low Income Housing Coalition at <http://www.nlihc.org>.

### **Gag rule in affordable housing trust fund**

On October 27, the House voted 331-90 to pass the Federal Housing Finance Reform Act (H.R. 1461), a reform of Freddie Mac and Fannie Mae that included a provision to establish an affordable housing trust fund. However, the final version of the bill included the controversial “gag rule” that would prevent any nonprofit from accessing the fund if it engaged in voter registration. The bill has now been sent to the Senate, where it will be considered by the Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs. The Senate’s version of the bill (S. 190) does not currently contain the “gag rule” for nonprofits, although it can still be added by amendment.

Full coverage of the “gag rule” issue is available through the organization OMB Watch:  
<http://www.ombwatch.org/article/articleview/3133/1/265?TopicID=1>

### **Congress slashes social programs**

On December 19, leaders of the House and Senate reached agreement on approximately \$40 billion in budget cuts targeting programs for low-income Americans. Included in the harsh cuts are benefit reductions and cost increases for Medicaid recipients, a new welfare work requirement, and cuts to child care and student loans. The House voted Monday to approve the spending cuts, and the Senate followed suit Wednesday, where Vice President Dick Cheney cast a tiebreaking vote. The final budget cuts reconciled two different bills passed by the House (\$50 billion) and Senate (\$35 billion), which at times had included even sharper cuts to food stamps and other social programs.

The Center on Budget and Policy Priorities has issued an analysis of the final budget cuts:  
<http://www.cbpp.org/12-18-05bud3.htm>

A detailed list of the budget cuts by program is available in an Associated Press report:  
<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/12/21/AR2005122100901.html>

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## **5. Recent housing research**

### **“U.S. Housing Market Conditions: Third Quarter, 2005,” U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development**

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development released its quarterly report on housing market conditions in mid-December. Housing starts set new records in the third quarter of 2005, but homeownership became less affordable: although interest rates remained low, housing prices increased, with a 3.8% increase in median price far outpacing a 1% increase in median income. The vacancy rate for rental apartments was just under 10%, slightly below the vacancy rate a year ago, and market absorption rates increased for rentals, with 65 percent of new units being rented within 3 months of completion.

<http://www.huduser.org/periodicals/ushmc.html>

### **“Out of Reach 2005,” National Low Income Housing Coalition**

The National Low Income Housing Coalition’s annual report on rental housing affordability, released in mid-December, details the extent of the housing affordability crisis. Among its notable conclusions, it reveals that there is not a single county in the United States where a full-time worker earning the minimum wage can afford to rent a one-bedroom apartment. The report also includes an updated estimate of the “housing wage,” or the monthly wage required for a full-time worker to be able to afford a two-bedroom apartment. The housing wage for New York State is \$19.73 an hour; for the New York metropolitan area, it’s \$21.79 an hour.

<http://www.nlihc.org/oor2005/>

**“Can Growth Work for New York's Communities? Community Development, Social & Environmental Justice, and the City's Future,” Pratt Center for Community Development**

In conjunction with a December 1 conference, the Pratt Center released this briefing paper discussing the problems of affordable housing, economic justice and environmental justice that are the byproduct of the economic growth being experienced by almost every corner of the city.

<http://www.prattcenter.net/publications.php#nygrowthbriefing>

**“Hazardous Homes: How NYC Fails Its Tenants,” Housing Here and Now**

This report, released by Housing Here and Now in November, reveals that the city is lagging in its response to buildings and landlords with multiple, severe violations of the building code, leaving tenants at risk.

[http://www.housinghereandnow.org/pdfs/hhn\\_hazardoushomes\\_11-17-05.pdf](http://www.housinghereandnow.org/pdfs/hhn_hazardoushomes_11-17-05.pdf)

**“Homelessness Counts in Major Cities and Counties,” Institute for the Study of Homelessness and Poverty, Weingart Center Association**

The Institute for the Study of Homelessness and Poverty at the Weingart Center has released a detailed count of the homeless population in metropolitan areas across the country. The locales with the largest numbers of homeless residents relative to total population are Detroit (1.6%) and Orange County, California (1.2%). For the New York metropolitan area, the ratio is 0.6%, with 48,000 homeless people counted among a population of 8.1 million.

<http://www.weingart.org/center/pdf/200512-city-county-homeless-counts.pdf>

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## **6. Upcoming events**

January 16, 2006

Christ Church UCC, Bronx, NY

**Building on the Dream: Habitat for Humanity-NYC's 6<sup>th</sup> Annual Martin Luther King, Jr. Day of Service and Celebration**

Please join Habitat-NYC as we commemorate the Martin Luther King, Jr. holiday by bringing together advocates, grassroots activists, and community members for a conversation about strategies for social change.

On Monday, January 16, Habitat-NYC will join Christ Church UCC and the Martin Luther King, Jr. Center for Nonviolence to host an afternoon program near Habitat-NYC's new building site in the Mott Haven section of the South Bronx. The program will feature a panel discussion on the theme of “Tools for Success: Advocacy for Policy Change in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.” Activists and advocates from a range of fields will discuss how they have waged successful campaigns for social justice.

This is a critical time for all people concerned with fundamental issues of social justice to seek a common voice and common ground for change. We hope this annual MLK event will serve as a “big tent” for advocates and activists from housing, health care, immigration reform and economic justice to unite to build knowledge, resources and a vision for a just city and society.

Monday's event will take place at Christ Church UCC, located at 860 Forest Avenue at East 160<sup>th</sup> Street, in the Bronx. To reach the church, take the 2 train or the 5 local to Prospect Avenue, walk 3 blocks west on 160<sup>th</sup> Street, then turn right on Forest Avenue.

The schedule is as follows:

12-1 p.m.: MLK service at Christ Church UCC

1-2 p.m.: Luncheon with special guests Bronx Borough President Adolfo Carrion and Christ Church UCC's Reverend Bruce Rivera

2-4 p.m. Panel discussion: "Tools for Success: Advocacy for Policy Change in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century"

An invitation to the event is available at [http://www.habitatnyc.org/pdf/mlk06\\_flier.pdf](http://www.habitatnyc.org/pdf/mlk06_flier.pdf).

January 26-27, 2006

Oakland, CA

**National Alliance to End Homelessness: National Conference on Ending Family Homelessness**

This conference will bring together leaders from across the country to share ideas about how to end homelessness among families with children.

For more details and information on registration:

<http://www.naeh.org/FamConf2006/>

February 27-28, 2006

Washington, DC

**National Low Income Housing Coalition: Annual Housing Policy Conference and Lobby Day**

The conference will feature workshops on many current issues in housing policy, a session on post-hurricane affordable housing policies, and a day of lobbying on Capitol Hill by individual groups and state coalitions.

For more information and registration:

<https://www.nlihc.org/conference.html>

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## **7. Coming Soon: Habitat-NYC's new Housing Justice Action Center**

With the launch of the 2006 Housing Covenant on Martin Luther King, Jr. weekend in January, Habitat for Humanity-NYC will also debut a new and powerful online advocacy toolkit.

Through the Housing Justice Action Center, you will be able to send letters to state and federal officials right from our Web site, sign up for automatic updates on action alert items, and see at-a-glance how your representatives stand on key housing issues. The next edition of the Advocacy E-Newsletter will take you to the new site, which will make you, our network of advocates, an even stronger force for housing justice in NYC, New York State, and the country.

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**Habitat for Humanity – New York City  
transforms lives and our city by uniting all New Yorkers  
around the cause of decent, affordable housing for everyone.**

To join the Covenant Action Network, sign up at our Web site:  
**<http://www.habitatnyc.org/advocate.html>**