



Testimony of Habitat for Humanity - New York City

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City Planning Commission

Testimony respectfully submitted by:
Jonathan Furlong
Community Relations Associate
Habitat for Humanity - New York City

Introduction

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Jonathan Furlong, and I am the Community Relations Associate at Habitat for Humanity - New York City. Habitat-NYC is a proud member of Queens for Affordable Housing, which is a coalition of community-based organizations that was formed to ensure that new residential development in Queens creates housing that is truly affordable to a diverse mix of residents.

As an affordable housing developer and advocate, Habitat for Humanity - New York City urges the City to make half of the housing units included in the Hunters Point South development in Community Board 2 affordable to working families in Queens. As part of that 50% set aside, 20% of those units should be affordable to low-income families earning less than \$25,000.

Habitat-NYC was founded in 1984 as an independent affiliate of Habitat for Humanity International, and we build affordable housing in all five boroughs. Our homes are built with the “sweat equity” of our family partner homeowners, who work side-by-side with volunteers.

In addition to building homes, Habitat-NYC is a leading advocate for affordable housing, with the goal of ensuring that every New Yorker has a decent, affordable home. We work to achieve this by creating a social movement to end the housing crisis plaguing New York City and by calling on elected officials to make affordable housing a priority. We were an instrumental voice in the fight for Inclusionary Zoning along the Brooklyn waterfront. Today, we are urging you to create the same kind of affordable housing opportunities at Hunters Point South.

The Need for Affordable Housing in Queens

The need for more affordable housing in the Queens is tremendous. Currently Queens is the second most populous borough in the city, and is home to the largest percentage of immigrants and the highest percentage of residents over the age of 65. Between 1990 and 2000, Queens experienced the largest population growth of any borough, up a dramatic 14.2%. As the borough has grown, real incomes have fallen – and rents have skyrocketed.

Queens now has the second-highest number of households earning less than \$50,000 per year (377,645, or 23.7%). Unfortunately, very few of the new units being developed in Queens have been affordable to low- or moderate-income families. Even though one quarter of Queen’s households are eligible for a range of affordable programs targeting low-income families, the borough has received only 3.7% of the units affordable to families under the Bloomberg Administration’s programs.

- **Currently Queens leads all boroughs in the Rate of Severe Crowding among renter households.**
- **Nearly one-third of all households in Queens (31.2%) pay more than 30% of their income in rent.**
- **Nearly one in every five households lives in severely overcrowded homes with the neighborhoods of Corona, Elmhurst and Jackson Heights suffering the highest rates of severe overcrowding.**
- **The income diversity in Queens is second lowest among all 5 boroughs, indicating a concentration of poverty in many neighborhoods and communities.**

Over the next 20 years, Queens is expected to absorb the largest share of growth in the New York metropolitan region – which will make the housing shortage even more acute. Out of all the community districts in the city, the neighborhoods surrounding Hunters Point South have one of the lowest percentages (.03%) of subsidized rental units so desperately needed by Queens residents.

Hunters Point South Proposal

Of the 6,650 total units at Hunters Point South, the proposed project will have 1,000 units at 165% of AMI, 1,000 units at 130% of AMI, and 1,000 units at 80%. The rest will be market-rate. These proposed affordable housing units in the Hunters Point South development would be priced out of range for most Queens residents. More than 60% of Queens households (477,934 out of a total of 782,523) earn less than the proposed minimum income. The units are currently priced far beyond the reach of the vast majority of immigrant families in Queens working in retail, education, food, and health services.

Recommendations

For new housing development at Hunters Point South to address the deepest problems facing the community, it must be affordable to residents of the surrounding neighborhoods. Public land being developed by the city must be committed to housing affordable to people living in or near the community. At Hunters Point South, Habitat-NYC believes that:

- **At least half of the units should be affordable to residents of the surrounding neighborhoods offering a range of low-, moderate- and middle-incomes.** As a model, we point to a current EDC development on East 125th Street in East Harlem, where units are affordable to households

middle-income, moderate-income and low-income levels – with a roughly third of the homes set at each level.

- **At least 20% of the units should be affordable to low-income families:**
At least 20% of the units should be affordable to the nearly 200,000 Queens households that earn less than \$25,000. Inclusion of these units can actually be financially beneficial for the development, since it would allow tax-exempt bond financing to be used.

Habitat for Humanity – New York City is urging EDC, and the City to make housing at the Hunters Point South development truly affordable to the average Queens family. In doing so the city will have created a project that is accessible to a diverse mix of Queens residents.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.