



**Testimony of Habitat for Humanity - New York City
to the New York City Planning Commission**

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Testimony respectfully submitted by:
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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 the borough creates housing that is truly affordable to a diverse mix of Queens residents.

As an affordable housing developer and advocate, Habitat for Humanity - New York City urges the City to make two-thirds of the housing units included in the Willets Point development in Community Board 7 affordable to working families in Queens, with special focus on affordability for the neediest residents.

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 Borough of Queens is tremendous. Between 1990 and 2000, Queens experienced the largest population growth of any other borough, with its total population increasing 14.2%. Over the next 20

years, the Borough of Queens is expected to absorb the largest share of growth in the New York metropolitan region – making the housing shortage even more acute.

As the borough has grown, real incomes have fallen, while rents have skyrocketed:

- **In 2006 the median monthly rent in Queens was \$983, the second highest out of all the boroughs¹.**
- **Queens registered the second highest increase in the percentage of residents spending 50 percent of their income – a 27.4 percent increase from 1999 to 2006.**

The housing market in Queens is booming today: More than 16,000 new housing units were built between 1994 and 2003, and over 5,000 units received residential building permits in 2004 alone. In 2006, Queens had the second highest number of housing starts in any borough, at 7,792.² The communities of Ridgewood and Maspeth experienced a 500% increase in housing starts from 2003 to 2005, Astoria 300% and Flushing, Woodside and Jackson Heights 200%.

Unfortunately, very little of this new development includes affordable units. The vast majority of new development in Queens is market-rate and luxury housing. Just across the Flushing River, the Muss Development Organization is building 1,110 condos priced at \$400,000 to \$1.2 million, and the sales price for new condos in Flushing starts at \$650 per square foot. These prices are far beyond what existing residents can afford. The proposed development at Willets Point represents a tremendous opportunity for the creation of affordable units, where very little has existed previously.

¹ The Furman Center, State of New York City's Housing and Neighborhoods, 2007.

² The Furman Center, State of New York City's Housing and Neighborhoods, 2007.

Recommendations

The City is proposing to create 5,500 new residential units at Willets Point, but **it must be affordable to residents of the surrounding neighborhoods**. If an agreement is reached to redevelop the 61 acres of land, we would like the city to utilize a tiered approach that genuinely serves very low-income families. Any housing that is created should be accessible to immigrants and also include a dedicated senior housing component. We recommend that:

- **At least one third of the units should be affordable to very low-income families** – households earning less than \$25,000 a year.
- **At least one-third of the units should be affordable to low-, moderate- and middle-income families**, using multiple income tiers to insure affordability at a range of incomes.
- **Most of the units should be affordable to residents of the surrounding neighborhoods, at 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 roughly one-third of the units are middle-income, one-third are moderate-income and one-third are low-income.
- **The affordable housing units created should be affordable in perpetuity**. This will prevent the crisis of expiring affordable units that exists in many programs.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.