

Expert Roundtable on Housing Development

-Summary of Findings-

BACKGROUND

Launched in 2007, the *Age-friendly New York City* initiative is assessing local structures and services in order to develop strategies that will make New York City more accessible to, and inclusive of, older people with varying needs and capacities. This work, which is being carried out by the New York Academy of Medicine in collaboration with both the Mayor and the City Council of New York, is particularly focused on eight domains of city life, including:

- outdoor spaces and buildings;
- transportation;
- housing;
- respect and social inclusion;
- social participation;
- communication and information;
- civic participation and employment; and,
- community support and health services.

Now in the assessment phase, the initiative is collecting information about the advantages and barriers older New Yorkers experience in the eight areas of city living outlined above – and what changes may be needed. To inform this process, the New York City Council and the New York Academy of Medicine are co-convening a series of seven roundtable discussions to talk directly with experts from various sectors. The purpose of the roundtables is to identify the ideas, concerns, and ideas relating to the anticipated growth of the City's older population *and* to identify contributions that these respective sectors can make (and in some instances, have already made) toward bettering the lives of New York's older residents -- and what may be needed to develop/expand these efforts. The seven roundtables, which were carried out in January and February of 2008, focused on the following topic areas:

- 1) *Business*, chaired by Partnership for New York City President Kathryn Wylde;
- 2) *Housing Development*, chaired by Citizens Housing and Planning Council Executive Director Jerilyn Perine;
- 3) *Civic Engagement*, chaired by Wagner School of Public Service Professor Walter Stafford;
- 4) *Transportation and Outdoor Spaces*, chaired by Straphangers Campaign Senior Attorney Gene Russianoff;
- 5) *Tenant Rights*, chaired by Citywide Taskforce on Housing Court Executive Director Louise Seeley;
- 6) *Social Services*, chaired by United Way of New York City CEO Gordon Campbell; and,
- 7) *Health*, chaired by New York Academy of Medicine President Jo Ivey Boufford.

The following provides a summary of the major themes to emerge from the Housing Development Roundtable discussion, which was held in the Red Room of City Hall on Thursday, January 31, 2008.

PARTICIPANTS

- City Council Speaker Christine Quinn
- City Council Member Maria del Carmen Arroyo, Chair of the Committee on Aging
- City Council Member James Vacca, Chair of the Subcommittee on Senior Center
- City Council Member Erik Martin Dilan, Chair of the Committee on Housing
- City Council Member Rosie Mendez, Chair of the Subcommittee on Public Housing
- Ruth Finkelstein, Vice President for Health Policy, The New York Academy of Medicine
- Jerilyn Perine, Executive Director, Citizens Housing and Planning Council of New York
- Brad Lander, Director, Pratt Institute Center for Community and Environmental Development
- Claudia Siegman, Program Manager of the New York Child Care Seed Fund, Low Income Investment Fund
- Dan Martin, President and CEO, Housing Partnership Development Corporation
- Edward Poteat, President, Horsford & Poteat Realty Corporation
- Eloise Paul, Assistant Director of Special Projects, Real Estate Department at Columbia University
- Frank Ricci, Director of Government Affairs, Rent Stabilization Association
- Greg Watson, Assistant Commissioner, New York State Division of Housing and Community Renewal
- Heather Lawler, Community Development Officer, Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC)
- John Tynan, Director of Housing, Catholic Charities - Diocese of Brooklyn & Queens
- Marc Jahr, President, NYC Housing Development Corporation
- Matthew Sapolin, Executive Director, Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities
- Rosanne Haggerty, Founder and President, Common Ground
- Vicki Been, Co-Director, The Furman Center For Real Estate & Urban Policy at New York University

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What are the unmet housing needs of the existing senior population in New York City?
- Will these needs change over the next 15 to 20 years? If so, how will this impact the city's overall housing situation?
- Are there existing housing programs/initiatives that ought to be increased or adapted to better meet the needs of older adults?
- Are new programs/initiatives needed? If so, what might these new models/improvements look like?
- What would be ways to include or expand the voice of older people in housing development decision-making?
- What supports do developers need to help them accommodate the needs of older people?
- What steps might developers be willing to commit to in the short term? Long term?

MAJOR THEMES TO EMERGE

The discussion focused both on identifying and spurring innovative housing development for older people *and* on improving the conditions of existing housing in order to support aging in place. In general, participants suggested various possible ways to support new projects, promote flexibility and incentives, and limit unintended consequences.

I. Keeping Older People in their Homes

A. *Participants expressed a growing need for increased home- and community-based social services that help people remain living at home, even as functional capacity and health needs change over time.*

Recommendations

- Strengthen case management in order to meet the unique, and sometimes shifting, needs of older residents
- Especially target social services to people living longer with chronic diseases such as HIV, as well as returning veterans and undocumented elders who lack access to income supports
- Expansion of New York State's existing Home and Community-based Medicaid Waiver should be explored in an attempt to fund additional programs needed to support community-dwelling older adults

B. *Participants recognized the enormous role that New York City's lack of affordable housing can have on the ability of seniors' to remain living at home.*

Recommendations

- Increase the promotion and ultimate utilization of current supports available to help seniors stay in their homes (often such programs are underutilized). Exploration of the costs to the City associated with full utilization should be examined. Examples of such programs include:
 - Senior Citizen Rent Increase Exemption (SCRIE): low-income older tenants that qualify for this program are exempt from future rent guidelines increases; landlords receive tax abatements instead.
 - RESTORE (Emergency Home Repair Program for the Elderly): funds may be used to pay for the cost of emergency repairs to eliminate hazardous conditions in homes owned by the elderly when the homeowners cannot afford to make the repairs in a timely fashion.
 - Access to Home program: provides financial assistance to property owners to make dwelling units accessible for low- and moderate income persons with disabilities. Providing assistance with the cost of adapting homes to meet the needs of those with disabilities will enable individuals to safely and comfortably continue to live in their residences and avoid institutional care. (adapt housing for handicapped)
 - Program of All-inclusive Care for the Elderly (PACE): provides comprehensive health services for individuals over age 55 who are sufficiently frail to be categorized as "nursing home eligible" by their state's Medicaid program. In New York City, the not-for-profit corporation Comprehensive Care Management (CCM) combines an adult day center with medical care and home care and a fixed per member per month payment.
- Strengthen the SCRIE program by implement a retroactive clause that allows seniors to roll their rent back to when they were first eligible for the SCRIE program, instead of when they first applied. Another possibility would be to cap the amount a senior can pay on their rent at 30% of their annual income.
- Fair financing options must be promoted among older homeowners
- Rent regulated housing units must be preserved as much as possible, as seniors may have the most to lose from vacancy decontrol

- C. ***Participants emphasized that we cannot rely solely on the creation of new housing to support older people. Instead, supporting the continuum of needs among older adults requires that existing housing units be retrofitted to ensure seniors can remain in their homes, even if changes in functional capacity occur.***

Recommendations

- To get closer to the ideal of universal design (or making all spaces accessible for all users), which can be quite expensive, the regulatory process must be eased and the incentives to developers increased
- The New York State Energy Research and Development Authority should increase/expand the resources it offers for retrofitting housing via its programs and incentives to assist residents in making homes more energy efficient, more comfortable and healthy, and better for the environment

II. Developing New Housing Options

- A. **Participants expressed a need for new, innovative, and diverse housing models to meet the emerging needs of seniors and the growing demand for different housing options.**

Recommendations

- Expand Project-based Section 8 vouchers in the City: Traditional tenant-based vouchers are attached to a particular tenant regardless of where they choose to live. A project-based voucher, however, is attached to a particular property. If a person with a project-based voucher moves, the Section 8 stays with the property and the next tenant uses the voucher.
- Explore the preferences of older adults in terms of living in age-segregated or age-integrated housing. The current trend is to want to build integrated housing, which seems to be the preference of many older people, but funding streams often emphasize segregated housing (such as the Section 202 program).
- Expand affordable housing options that do not disadvantage or exclude seniors raising grandchildren

- B. **Many barriers to housing development surfaced in the discussion, including regulatory obstacles and a lack of resources.**

Recommendations

- The City need to identify and make available to developers new land for building additional housing
- The City's zoning rule R-6B makes it difficult to build senior housing. There are ten standard residence districts in New York City -- R1 through R10. The numbers refer to the permitted density (R1 having the lowest density; R10 the highest) and certain other controls such as required parking. The regulations of R6B encourage low-rise buildings with greater parking lot coverage, which makes it difficult for developers to increase the number of total units in building and thereby fewer affordable set-asides
- Significant funding from the federal level is needed for adequate development

C. Participants stressed the need to provide additional incentives in order to drive ‘age-friendly’ housing development and promote affordability among existing housing.

Recommendations

- The City should offer density/zoning bonuses to builders in exchange for low-income units (like inclusionary zoning models)
- Provide incentives for the development of affordable mixed housing with senior set-asides
- Create designated geographic zones where builders can get incentives to build affordable units for older people – perhaps in areas where seniors are most concentrated
- Cut property tax rates for property owners
- Offer tax relief for owners who keep units affordable
- Offer incentives to developers to integrate universal design into their projects

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