

August 14, 2006

## Editorial Piece to AM-NY re: Affordable Housing Crisis in New York City

AM-NY should be applauded for their diverse, accurate and timely coverage of New York City's affordable housing crisis. The Mayor's affordable housing initiative is definitely an ambitious and admirable endeavor. What the City ignores, however, is that *how* affordable housing is constructed also has far-reaching implications for the livelihood of our City and its inhabitants.

On Thursday's installation of AM-NY's four-part series, HPD's spokesperson Neil Coleman suggested that there is a perception that affordable housing is designed and constructed poorly. HPD wants to prove that this is not the case. However, recent findings by Urban Agenda, a policy and research organization, have identified some residual problems that need to be urgently addressed. Urban Agenda's two-pronged research interviewed owners and tenants of low to middle-income affordable housing developments about their new homes. Although the results identified exceptional work like that of 1400 on 5<sup>th</sup>, a development by Full Spectrum New York, we also found that many new owners are forced to invest large sums of money in order to mitigate the deteriorating conditions of their buildings. For example, homeowners in a newly rehabbed building on Clinton Avenue in the Bronx shared with us that windows in their home were installed without adequate caulking or insulation making frigid winters practically unbearable. To make matters worse, the heating system was defective. The homeowner told us that heating valves had to be opened everyday to allow water to drain. Even with this daily exercise, the heat is still not as sufficient as it should be. In another building on Clinton Avenue, homeowners told us that basement leaks caused disastrous flooding and water damage. They also expressed concern that their windows had not been properly installed, allowing cold winds to pass through windows that would not close all the way.

Urban Agenda also interviewed construction workers on various city-subsidized housing development sites. This study found rampant violation of health, safety, and hourly wage laws. In fact, 50% of the workers surveyed explained that they were forced to work hours for which they were not paid and over 75% lacked health care.

Bloomberg is right: Affordable housing *is* fundamental to our long-term economic prosperity. What is as important is that the affordable housing that is constructed be of the best and most durable quality to ensure sustainability throughout the years for the families and communities this housing stock will affect. The City should also make sure that the affordable housing it intends to pay for with taxpayer money be constructed in the most equitable and just manner for everyone, construction workers that help erect the housing and for end users.

New York City has long been a leader in subsidizing the development of affordable housing to address its housing needs. New York City can maximize its investment to use affordable housing development as a way to create family-sustaining-wage jobs and improve the environmental health of communities. Current practices that have undermined the Mayor's good intentions to house the City's working and middle class must be changed.

Urban Agenda is an action-oriented public policy, research, and advocacy organization dedicated to building a stronger and more diverse labor movement and a socially, environmentally, and economically just New York City. We are a project of the NYC Central Labor Council. Look for us at [www.urbanagenda.org](http://www.urbanagenda.org).