

The Making of a Movement

How Organizing is
Transforming Housing
in New York City

An INCO Organizing Case Study

By Neil F. Carlson

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Foreword

In 2003, the Association for Neighborhood and Housing Development, in partnership with the Neighborhood Opportunities Fund, launched the Initiative for Neighborhood and City-Wide Organizing (INCO), a four-year strategy for building grassroots leadership and organizing capacity among neighborhood-based housing groups throughout New York City. INCO's theory of change is simple: By providing grant money and capacity-building assistance, INCO will help build internal organizing capacity among its 17 grantee organizations. And by strengthening their ability to organize effectively, INCO grantees will produce both concrete neighborhood-level change and be able to win changes to city-wide affordable housing policy.

Over a year into the initiative, the theory seems to be holding true. This past year, victories in three city-wide organizing campaigns have profoundly changed city housing policy:

- Thanks to the **inclusionary zoning** campaigns waged by INCO groups and others, rezoning plans for Manhattan's Far West Side and Brooklyn's Williamsburg/Greenpoint neighborhoods include tax and building incentives that are expected to generate nearly 6,900 affordable units.
- This summer, a campaign for **targeted cyclical inspections** culminated in an agreement with the city's Department of Housing Preservation and Development that will create a mechanism for regular, targeted inspections of the city's worst buildings—along with guaranteed enforcement action against owners who refuse to make repairs. In all, the pilot program will guarantee repairs to 7,200 apartments per year.
- The **Battery Park City** campaign sought to compel the city to make good on its historic promise to use revenues from the Battery Park City Authority for low-income housing. Earlier this year, Mayor Bloomberg and Comptroller Thompson agreed to use Battery Park City revenues for the next four years—\$130 million in all—to build and preserve affordable housing.

INCO groups, working with each other, and sometimes as parts of broader coalitions, played an effective, indispensable role in linking city-wide campaigns to existing structures at the community level. In so doing, INCO has allowed thousands of local residents to reshape city housing policy.

When we first began planning the initiative five years ago, the state of organizing among NYC's community-based housing groups was questionable, and it is a testament to the vision and wisdom of the Neighborhood Opportunities Fund supporters—especially Mike Pratt, Darren Walker, Gary Hattem, and Pat Swann—that INCO exists at all. They stepped up to the plate, insisting that organized communities are strong communities, and that a progressive city-wide housing agenda must be built on a foundation of strong, strategic, sustainable grassroots power.

This collection of case studies is the first product to emerge from INCO's ongoing effort to document and share our work with colleagues, funders, policymakers, and the public. We plan to publish a final, in-depth report when INCO wraps up in January 2008. In the interim we will continue to write periodically about the evolution of our work—the successes, the missteps, the lessons, and the challenges. We welcome your continued interest and invite your comments.

Sincerely,

Benjamin Dulchin

Director

INITIATIVE FOR NEIGHBORHOOD AND CITY-WIDE ORGANIZING

Introduction

Over the past three years, housing organizing has helped spur a sea change in New York City housing policy. In 2003, Mayor Bloomberg announced his “New Housing Marketplace” plan to create and preserve 65,000 units of affordable housing. While community-based housing groups were glad to see housing back on the city’s policy agenda, many of them felt the plan did too little to create housing for the lowest-income New Yorkers, families earning less than \$31,000 per year. It also failed to ensure that the surplus funds from Battery Park City—long promised for affordable housing—would be used that way. And it did nothing to address the need for strengthened code enforcement to improve conditions in troubled buildings.

As part of his housing plan, Mayor Michael Bloomberg announced plans to rezone over twenty New York City communities. Private development and market-rate housing would be the catalysts, and the administration resisted initial calls to link rezoning to the creation of low- and moderate-income housing. Yet in response to a city-wide organizing campaign that pushed for “inclusionary zoning”—using the city’s zoning authority to mandate or incent private development of low- and moderate-income housing—the city’s rezoning plans emerged markedly different from what was originally proposed. On the Far West Side of Manhattan, the Hudson Yards rezoning plan included real estate and tax incentives for private developers, along with a commitment of public land and resources, that will generate 28 percent of new and renovated units for low- and moderate-income residents. A plan for a 170-block area in North Brooklyn included similar affordable housing components and is expected to generate 33 percent affordable units. More significantly, the inclusionary zoning campaign established a string of precedents that will help ensure that low- and moderate-income families can afford to live in New York City.

Earlier this summer, a two year campaign led by the Association for Neighborhood and Housing Development culminated in a landmark agreement between the City Council and the Department of Housing Preservation and Development that will allow for targeted, cyclical roof-to-cellar inspections of the city’s most hazardous apartment buildings. Equally important, the new Targeted Cyclical Enforcement Program (T-CEP) guarantees enforcement action and litigation against landlords who disobey repair orders—a major departure from past policies. By linking inspection to enforcement, T-CEP fundamentally changes the way the city enforces housing codes, guaranteeing repairs to 7,200 apartments each year, and integrating tenant organizing into the city’s inspection and enforcement policy.

This past April, housing organizers won an historic victory when Mayor Michael Bloomberg and Comptroller William Thompson announced plans to create a \$130 million trust fund for low-cost housing, using revenues from a decades-old deal with the Battery Park City Authority. The new fund—which, over the next four years, will be used to build or preserve 4,500 apartments for low-income New Yorkers—was also the direct result of a year-long organizing campaign by a broad coalition of housing groups, policy experts, unions, and advocates for the homeless and tenants.

What accounts for this string of organizing victories? To be sure, the fact that these campaigns unfolded in a mayoral election year underscores the extent to which affordable housing has become a hot political issue. But mayoral politics also tend to obscure the larger truth that these victories came as a part of a concerted grass-

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By even the grossest measure of return-on-investment, organizing is a home-run. INCO's grants budget was \$750,000 divided between 15 organizations. Yet those organizations—along with others—won \$130 million for low-income housing (Battery Park City); leveraged 6,900 units of new affordable housing (inclusionary zoning), and won guaranteed repairs to 7,200 existing units per year.

roots organizing campaign that pushed affordable housing issues into the political limelight. As one longtime organizer put it: “To win victories like this, you need to be organized, have sympathetic allies in government, and you need to be lucky. Without the organizing, though, the rest doesn’t matter.”

This report documents these three campaigns—inclusionary zoning, cyclical inspections, and Battery Park City—illustrating the tactics, partnerships, strategies, and context that shaped these advances in New York City housing policy. In all three cases, organizing was a part of a broader constellation of forces shaping change, insufficient as a stand-alone strategy, but an indispensable complement to other strategies.

Though each campaign assumed its own character and trajectory of change, seven themes emerged, in different combinations, throughout the three cases. These are the principal lessons—and overarching challenges—facing funders, organizers, and communities as they work to find the combinations of housing policy, market forces, and community input that will give rise to more and better affordable housing in New York City.

1. **Organizing can redefine the universe of the possible.** In all three cases, organizing campaigns were instrumental in redefining what was politically possible for affordable housing in New York City. At the outset of the inclusionary zoning campaign, city planners and the Bloomberg administration were dead set against using zoning policy to reshape the private housing market. And while the eventual rezoning plans did not include the mandatory inclusionary zoning provisions organizers wanted, the fact that the rezoning plans for North Brooklyn and the Far West Side have strong market-based incentives has redefined the debate. Henceforth, inclusionary zoning will be the rule for future rezonings, not the exception.
2. **The importance of matching sound policy with effective organizing.** The strength of all three campaigns was rooted in sound, smart policy. As one organizer noted: “Organizing campaigns don’t spring fully formed from the thigh of Zeus.” Laying the policy groundwork legitimized the campaigns among policymakers, elected officials, the media, business and real estate interests, and the public. Without an empirical policy case, campaigns go nowhere.
3. **Organizing is essential to creating the political pressure needed to move policymakers.** As the campaigns for Battery Park City and cyclical inspections illustrate, organizers benefit from having smart, open-minded policymakers on the other side of the bargaining table—but it often takes pressure to bring them there. HPD Commissioner Shaun Donovan won widespread praise for his sagacious, pragmatic view of organizers’ policy demands, but outside political pressure also played a role. Organizing got the City Council to promise to override a mayoral veto of the code enforcement bill. The administration likewise acquiesced to inclusionary zoning when it became clear that the City Council backed the idea, but more importantly, that local residents were opposed to rezoning without inclusionary provisions.
4. **Coalitions bring scale, flexibility, and power—but they must be rooted in members’ long-term interests.** The Battery Park City and inclusionary zoning campaigns illustrate the value of working in coalition. The Battery Park City campaign included ACORN, nonprofit

housing developers, housing organizers, advocates for the homeless, and AIDS-housing activists—all of whom had a vested interest in securing the city’s long-promised funds for affordable housing.

5. **Mobilization makes it happen.** All three cases underscored a fundamental principle of organizing: Power responds to organized people and campaigns are won and lost on mobilization. The Battery Park City and inclusionary zoning campaigns in particular showed that the housing community could mobilize constituents. This is a lesson not lost on anyone in an election year. But it is a lesson in democracy, too. In an age of political cynicism, money often talks the loudest. But these campaigns underscored the fact that organized communities can reshape politics.
6. **Big campaigns need big strategy.** The intellectual groundwork for the inclusionary zoning and Battery Park City campaigns were in place before the campaigns developed, but it was political exigencies that set the campaigns in motion. Campaign organizers recognized that the 2005 mayoral elections were a potential spark for their issues, so they worked to place housing issues in the public spotlight—working the City Council (especially Speaker Gifford Miller, who was also running for mayor) and massaging the media. It was this fusion of long-term goals and short-term opportunism that defined the strategy.
7. **Funding for organizing is a good investment.** All three campaigns tapped into an existing infrastructure of community-based organizing conducted through organizations with extremely limited resources. One of the organizations featured here, for instance, supports a four-person organizing staff on a budget of just over \$100,000. And yet by even the grossest measure of return-on-investment, organizing is a home-run. INCO’s grants budget was \$750,000 divided between 15 organizations. (INCO has since grown to 17 groups, with an \$850,000 grants budget for 2005.) Those organizations—along with others—won \$130 million for low-income housing (Battery Park City); leveraged 6,900 units of new affordable housing (inclusionary zoning), and won guaranteed repairs to 7,200 existing units per year (TCEP). It will be impossible to maintain this momentum and expand the movement without resources commensurate to the growing need.

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Inclusionary Zoning: Remaking the Map

Gentrification had been growing in both neighborhoods over the past decade, and many residents felt rezoning would push out the remaining low and moderate-income residents.

In June 2003, the Bloomberg administration announced plans to rezone over twenty New York communities in one of the most ambitious development plans since the days of Robert Moses. That the city was facing a housing crisis was indisputable. Over the past ten years the city had gained about 500,000 new residents but added just 85,000 new houses and apartments. Almost half of all renters pay more than thirty percent of their income for housing, and twenty-five percent pay more than half. By converting manufacturing areas to residential use, increasing density by allowing taller residential and commercial buildings, and promoting mixed-use business districts, the administration's plan promised to unleash the power of the private market to generate over 50,000 units of new housing. Yet most of the proposed housing was slated as market-rate—units that would sell or rent to people earning over \$100,000 per year. Critics argued that the plan would do little to help ease the shortage of affordable housing for low- and moderate-income families, a prediction that came true as rezonings later that year in Park Slope and Long Island City yielded no new affordable housing.

The following year, the city announced plans to rezone two neighborhoods long prized by developers for their potential to draw top-dollar. The proposal for the Hudson Yards neighborhood on Manhattan's Far West Side targeted 59 city blocks between West 28th and 43rd streets and Seventh and Eighth avenues to the Hudson River. It called for an expansion of the Javitz Convention Center, an extension of the Number 7 subway line, a new stadium for the Jets, and higher density commercial and market-rate residential development. The plan for the Williamsburg/Greenpoint neighborhoods in North Brooklyn was even more ambitious. It called for opening up a nearly two-mile stretch of industrial properties to development of luxury high-rises. Further inland, the city would rezone the neighborhood's quirky mixed-used blend of warehouses, row houses, and manufacturing to permit residential buildings ranging in height from six-to twelve-stories.

Gentrification had been growing in both neighborhoods over the past decade, and many residents felt rezoning would push out the remaining low- and moderate-income residents. If the city was going to use its zoning authority to unleash the market, tenants and housing advocates wondered, why couldn't it use the same powers to ensure private developers create new affordable housing in the rezoned districts? Over the next two years, "inclusionary zoning" became the rallying cry for a coalition of neighborhood residents, churches, community development organizations, policy experts, and housing organizers as they waged a successful city-wide campaign to persuade city officials to create affordable-housing set-asides for neighborhood rezoning plans. The final plans, approved earlier this year, include a strong package of building bonuses and tax incentives for private developers who set aside a certain percentage of units for affordable housing, with the city committing public land and financing for affordable housing as well. All told, 28 percent of the units in Hudson Yards, and 33 percent of the units in North Brooklyn, are slated for low- and moderate-income households. New provisions also protect existing residents against displacement as developers assemble sites. But equally important are the precedents the campaigns set and the constituency that now exists to ensure that future rezoning plans meet the housing needs of all New Yorkers.

Framing the Issue, Creating a City-Wide Platform

Although the struggle for inclusionary zoning was a city-wide campaign, the specific battles were fought at the neighborhood level. As Alison Cordero, an organizer with St. Nicholas Neighborhood Preservation Corporation, an INCO grantee in Williamsburg, noted, “The impetus for this fight wasn’t statistical. It wasn’t about ratios for affordable housing. It was about what we were seeing on the ground, what we were seeing in our ongoing organizing work.” St. Nicks has been organizing low- and moderate-income tenants for 30 years, but organizers had seen an uptick in displacement over the past decade as Williamsburg and Greenpoint, the adjacent neighborhood, steadily gentrified. As the market heated up, building owners sought an increasing number of zoning variances that would allow them to transform the neighborhood’s industrial buildings into lofts and apartments. As industrial space was converted, manufacturing jobs for the area’s working-class residents disappeared and rents went up as the neighborhood became even more desirable. “Inclusionary zoning began at the neighborhood level,” Cordero continued. “We were fighting all these zoning variances to get some percentage of affordable housing included in them, but we couldn’t get the community board to look at them in an organized way.”

When the city released the Hudson Yards and North Brooklyn rezoning proposals, organizers realized they needed to connect their neighborhood struggle to a city-wide campaign. A few years earlier, the Fifth Avenue Committee, a community development corporation in Park Slope, Brooklyn, lost a bitter struggle to include affordable housing mandates in the city’s rezoning plan for Fourth Avenue. “The rezoning was all luxury units,” said Brad Lander, who was FAC’s executive director at the time. “We lost, plain and simple.” Now executive director of the Pratt Center for Community Development, a think tank focusing on city planning and public policy, Lander was determined not to let a similar fate befall other communities.

In January 2004, Lander hosted an informal gathering of housing organizers and policy advocates, including representatives from North Brooklyn and Far West Side housing organizations, to discuss what might constitute a progressive housing agenda for New York City. “There was a consensus that we were going to need more aggressive tactics, the kind of things Housing First, (a broad, ANHD-initiated coalition of housing groups and financial institutions) as an umbrella organization, just couldn’t do.” Inclusionary zoning shot up the list. “People realized that this was an idea that could provide a broader platform for insisting that growth and development must insure affordable housing for a wider range of New Yorkers,” Lander recalls. In partnership with New York ACORN, the local chapter of national community organizing group, and Habitat for Humanity NYC, the Pratt Center hired an organizer and launched the Campaign for Inclusionary Zoning, an umbrella organization of over 70 community, labor, religious, and advocacy organizations. As zoning fights played out at the neighborhood level, the Campaign added policy depth, visibility, and a coherent message for neighborhood-based efforts.

“The Pratt Center was important in two ways,” Cordero explained. “First, they provided the policy framework for inclusionary zoning, a way to connect neighborhood activism to a city-wide campaign. But even more crucial was the political understanding that came out of the Fourth Avenue organizing, what it took to move an agenda. That was A, you have to start early enough in the process to get the language of rezoning into the debate; and B, you need to get the borough president and the community board behind you.”

Following the campaign’s launch, the Pratt Center commissioned a report that outlined how inclusionary zoning might work in New York City. “We realized that we needed to lay the policy groundwork, to bring the issues

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into the mainstream,” Lander said. Though city housing officials recognized the need for affordable housing, the administration took a fundamentally *laissez faire* approach to real estate development. “Deputy Mayor Doctoroff”—the deputy mayor for economic development and rebuilding—“started from the idea that you shouldn’t mess with real estate markets,” Lander continued. But as the inclusionary zoning report pointed out, rezoning itself was a public action, so the issue of giving the market free rein was moot. In some cases, property owners could realize a five-fold increase in their land’s value through what was essentially a bureaucratic fiat. So the political question became one of what the public could demand in exchange. “Private windfalls should provide thoughtfully crafted public benefits,” the report noted. “Inclusionary zoning is one way to capture some of this new value (created by public action) for public purposes.” It also creates—or in these cases retains—mixed income neighborhoods and enhances integration. And it does so by leveraging the power of the market.

Released in the Fall of 2004, the Pratt Center’s inclusionary zoning report provided the theoretical framework for a city-wide inclusionary zoning policy. “The Campaign provided the academic resources and city-wide policy analysis, but it was the neighborhood leaders who were in negotiations with city officials,” said John Raskin, an organizer for Housing Conservation Coordinators (HCC), a community-based housing organization, and INCO grantee, based in Hell’s Kitchen, just north of Hudson Yards. But each community faced a different rezoning plan, and it was at the neighborhood level that the city-wide campaign got real traction.

Manhattan’s Far West Side

With its proposed mix of luxury housing, high density commercial development, and \$600 million in state and city subsidies for a new sports stadium, the city’s rezoning and development plan for the Hudson Yards neighborhood generated immediate opposition from community residents when it was released in June 2004. “There was a strong feeling of people being pushed out,” Raskin said. In the past decade, real estate agents had given Hell’s Kitchen a new name—“Clinton”—a moniker more befitting the rising rents and swank restaurants that had come to dominate the neighborhood. “People were worried about themselves and their neighbors. The rezoning plan, especially with the stadium, just hit that point home.”

A group of nonprofit developers, neighborhood associations, elected officials, and housing advocates came together as the Hell’s Kitchen/Hudson Yards Alliance to oppose the plan. Over the years, HCC, one of the alliance’s key partners, had built a strong base of tenant organizations and neighborhood associations, so the organizing infrastructure was already in place. In the late 1990s, HCC had also played a pivotal role in the campaign to insert anti-harassment provisions and demolition protections into the proposed rezoning of the Clinton Special District, a historic district that stretched from 8th Avenue to the Hudson River and from 34th to 59th Streets. “We had experience with land-use and zoning and how we could use those procedures to create affordable housing,” Raskin said.

Although the rezoning and the mayor’s proposal for a new stadium were technically separate issues—the stadium plan required the approval of state officials, while rezoning was a city affair—HCC and its allies linked the issues together, framing them as a referendum on public priorities. When contrasted with other possible uses for public expenditures—salaries for teachers, new schools, raises for firefighters—the mayor’s proposed \$600 million public subsidy for a new football stadium became a symbol of the city’s misplaced priorities.

“The comprehensive message we used was to ask, Who is all this development for?” Raskin said. “It wasn’t rational development on a human scale. The housing was not going to be affordable, and the stadium was this behemoth monstrosity that will suck up all this public money that could be better used for other public purposes, like schools and firefighters.”

As the campaign heated up, HCC and its partners found an unexpected ally in James Dolan, the head of Cablevision, the company that owned Madison Square Garden. The new stadium would be in direct competition with The Garden, and Dolan spent millions of dollars on commercials attacking the plan. But he also worked with local groups to sharpen their message. “Cablevision put a lot of money into helping figure out what the message should be,” Raskin said. “I think Dolan realized that he needed us to frame the stadium issue.” It was the grassroots organizing and the local message development, Raskin continued, that gave the city-wide message its resonance. With opposition to the stadium firmly rooted in local organizing, questions of housing, land use, and public priorities developed into defining political issues for the upcoming election season. But it was the mobilization of community residents that really got things started. Through the summer and into the fall, Hudson Yards Alliance members turned out hundreds of residents to speak out against the plan at community board meetings and public hearings. Daytime hearings typically drew 50 or so residents, while evening attendance numbered in the hundreds. “Turnout provided legitimacy for what people were saying at the hearings,” Raskin continued. “We heard back later that turnout and public testimony really changed perceptions.” Eventually, both community boards in the affected areas came out against the city’s plan, as did Chris Quinn, the local City Council representative.

In January 2005, the City Council adopted a rezoning plan that was quite different from the one originally proposed. The new plan gave developers a range of inclusionary zoning incentives. Most notably, builders got the right to build bigger, more profitable buildings if they set aside 20 – 30 percent of the units for low- and moderate-income households. Builders also have access to the “80-20” tax break, a tax subsidy given to developers who set aside 20 percent of their units for households making less than 60 percent of the area’s median income. Unlike previous 80-20 subsidies, which allow set-asides to convert to market-rate after 20 years, new units will be permanently earmarked for affordable housing. Overall, the rezoning is projected to create 3,400 units of affordable housing.

Williamsburg/Greenpoint

The city’s rezoning plan for Williamsburg/Greenpoint, two adjacent neighborhoods in North Brooklyn, was even more far-reaching than its plan for the Far West Side. Certified in October 2004, the plan called for redeveloping a nearly two-mile stretch of waterfront populated with vacant lots, factories, and warehouses. In place of these industrial sites, which industrial-retention advocates claimed were still viable for light-manufacturing, the city envisioned a 1.6 mile-long esplanade lined with high-density market-rate buildings. But there were no mandates for affordable housing. City officials insisted that the administration’s existing commitment of \$3 billion in public subsidies would spur private-sector development of affordable housing. “Developers will gladly develop properties using these programs,” a city planning spokesperson told *City Limits* magazine, “because there is no sweeter deal.”

Local residents viewed the proposed rezoning as the culmination of a decade-long struggle against industrial flight and residential displacement. As on the Far West Side, the North Brooklyn campaign emerged from an established base. “We had been organizing against harassment and displacement for years before the zoning plan came out,” said Barbara Schliff, organizing director of Los Sures, a local housing and community develop-

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ment organization, and INCO grantee, serving South Williamsburg's largely Latino community. As buildings changed hands, new owners were offering longtime tenants thousands of dollars to vacate their apartments so they could renovate and inflate the rent. If tenants didn't leave, some landlords would refuse to make repairs in an effort to force them out. Los Sures tenant organizing was a critical bulwark against tenant harassment and illegal evictions.

Both Los Sures and St. Nicholas Neighborhood Preservation Corporation had long histories of tenant and community organizing. Most recently, they were the principal partners in the Mobilization Against Displacement (MAD), a coalition of community groups that supported organizing, advocacy, and legal aid for residents fighting eviction and harassment. As the zoning campaign took shape, MAD served as the anchor for a broader coalition of community organizations, residents, industrial retention activists, policy advocates, and churches. Drawing on the Pratt Center's inclusionary zoning study, MAD and its allies demanded that the rezoning plan mandate that 40 percent of the housing developed under the new plan be set aside for low- and moderate-income households. According to one study, Greenpoint alone had lost 5,500 affordable rental units in the last decade, and community members saw this as an opportunity to stem the tide that was pulling longtime residents out of the neighborhood. "When you talk about luxury housing, you're not talking about the people who live here now," Schliff said. "Inclusionary zoning was about the people who fought long and hard to make this a livable place, and now that it is, they want to stay."

The coalition set about lining up political support and expanding its base among community residents. The involvement and leadership of the churches in the neighborhood was especially important. In May 2004, coalition members convened a meeting at Our Lady of Mt. Carmel that drew between 800 and 900 people, including the local bishop and elected officials. "That was a real turning point, bringing together all the churches in Greenpoint and Williamsburg," noted Jim O'Shea, an organizer with Churches United for Fair Housing, which represents six congregations and over 40,000 families. With both numbers and moral authority, the churches were critical allies. "Every elected leader got up and said to the bishop and all those people that they would support a 40 percent affordable housing requirement. That was when everyone said, 'We could actually win this.'"

City Council Representative David Yassky was an early and outspoken advocate of inclusionary zoning as was the local community board, which unanimously rejected the city's plan.

Borough President Marty Markowitz eventually opposed the city's original plan as well – after substantial pressure from local leaders and community groups when he was wavering. It was local residents, however, who drove the change. In November 2004, upwards of 700 residents packed a public hearing at a local high school auditorium. When HPD representatives began their presentation on the rezoning, residents took over the meeting, chanting "We want 40 percent." "As soon as they started talking, we left," said Rolando Guzman, an organizer with St. Nicks. "That was the turning point. That's when people took notice." A few days later, the coalition held a candlelight vigil on the waterfront that attracted 2,000 residents—artists and hipsters, working-class Latinos, and church members.

HPD Commissioner Shaun Donovan was widely praised for finding the middle ground. He made it clear to community representatives and elected officials who opposed the city's plan that a mandatory inclusionary zoning scheme simply wouldn't fly with this administration—but a plan packed with bonuses and incentives would. The following spring, the City Council approved a rezoning plan that used financial incentives and devel-

opment bonuses to support the goals of inclusionary zoning. Similar to the Far West Side, developers will be allowed to build taller buildings if they agree to set aside 20 - 25 percent of the units for affordable housing. The city will set aside most of the publicly-controlled developable land in the area, to be developed almost entirely as affordable housing. What's more, a majority of the affordable units will go to people at or below 60 percent of area median income, with a significant number going to those earning 20-40 percent of median income. The plan also has strong anti-harassment and anti-displacement provisions, including a \$2 million fund for tenant organizing, counseling and legal representation. Overall, the rezoning is projected to generate 3,500 affordable units.

Although the Hudson Yards and North Brooklyn rezoning struggles emerged and unfolded at the neighborhood level, the campaign infrastructure is now city-wide—as is the inclusionary zoning precedent. Organizers from St. Nicks and Los Sures are currently working with allies from HCC to bring the Clinton Special District's anti-displacement model across the river. And while organizers would have preferred a mandatory inclusionary zoning requirement, they are optimistic about the current plan's potential. "Hopefully it's a framework to create new affordable housing," St. Nicks' Cordero said. "It's not mandatory, but we think the incentives are strong enough."

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— Jim O'Shea

Cyclical Inspections: Fixing a Broken System

ANHD had long been critical of the city's inspection policy. Member organizations were constantly battling both slumlords and a grossly inefficient HPD inspection process.

On a sweltering day this past July, hundreds of New York City tenants and community leaders gathered on the steps of City Hall to celebrate the announcement of a new cyclical housing inspection agreement between the City Council and the Department of Housing Preservation and Development. With a sea of raucous tenants behind them, Speaker Gifford Miller and HPD Commissioner Shaun Donovan signed a giant memorandum of understanding which outlined the process by which the new inspection program will guarantee repairs to 7,200 apartments each year. "The policy announced today marks a major advance in the way that the city enforces its housing code," said Irene Baldwin, executive director of the Association for Neighborhood and Housing Development, which had just concluded a two-year campaign to change the city's inspection policy. "We thank the City Council and the administration for working with the neighborhood housing organizations to make homes more livable for some of the city's poorest families."

The new inspections program, known officially as the Targeted Cyclical Enforcement Program (T-CEP), provides a mechanism through which City Council members, local community groups, and HPD will together identify buildings in designated council districts that would benefit from roof-to-cellar inspections. Under the terms of the agreement, HPD will designate a team of ten inspectors, who will move among three designated council districts every two months. At the beginning of each cycle, HPD will meet with community groups and the Council member to draw up a list of the buildings and units most in need of inspection. Each district may designate up to 30 buildings and 400 units for comprehensive inspections. More importantly, however, the new agreement guarantees enforcement of the city's housing code. Under the old enforcement process, HPD did not provide accurate documentation or monitoring of cited violations, and the department lacked an efficient process for collecting fines. Landlords were allowed to "self-certify" certain types of violations, but penalties for false certification were relatively minor. By contrast, the new agreement outlines procedures for follow-up and enforcement: If HPD discovers that 80 percent of the

cited repairs have not been made, the city will sue landlords to force compliance. More fundamentally, the agreement represents an acknowledgement from the city that organizing is part of its anti-abandonment strategy, and housing organizers are partners in code enforcement.

A Campaign is Born

ANHD had long been critical of the city's inspection policy. Member organizations were constantly battling both slumlords and a grossly inefficient HPD inspection process. For years, HPD relied on tenant complaints for inspections. "If a tenant called, HPD would send out an inspector, but they would only look at that complaint," explained Manuel Castro, who until recently was an organizer with INCO grantee Make The Road By Walking, an organizing group in Bushwick, Brooklyn. Inspectors would return to different units in the same building but there was no mechanism in place to identify building-wide problems, or to ensure that cited violations got repaired. "Inspectors would walk through a crumbling lobby to get to an apartment with a complaint, but they wouldn't even look in the public areas." When landlords were cited for violations, HPD rarely followed up to make sure repairs had been made. It was a process analogous to fixing an old car engine as parts wore out instead of overhauling it at once—and then taking the mechanic's word that repairs were done even if they weren't. Finally, when HPD did fine landlords for violations the city had to take landlords to housing court to collect.

At the behest of its members, ANHD published a report documenting the crisis in New York City's housing code enforcement. The 2003 report had several important findings. First, it found that code violations were concentrated in five low-income neighborhoods in the South Bronx, Central Brooklyn, and Upper Manhattan, where the percentage of housing units with severe problems ranged from 8.8 percent to 12.8 percent—double to triple the city-wide average of 3.1 percent. Second, because the neighborhoods that were most at-risk were easily identifiable, it reasoned that a targeted enforcement strategy would yield more bang for the buck.

“It was clear to us that there should be roof-to-cellar inspections targeting the worst buildings,” recalled Benjamin Dulchin, the director of ANHD's Initiative on Neighborhood and City-Wide Organizing. Using the report as a foundation, ANHD launched a campaign to persuade HPD to adopt a new inspection regime called Tenant Petition Inspections (TPI) in which five or more tenants in the same building could petition the city to conduct comprehensive inspections. ANHD brought City Council Speaker Gifford Miller and other council members on a tour of the city's worst buildings. ANHD member organizations and local residents met with City Council members, wrote letters, and circulated petitions, lining up support for a TPI bill sponsored by Councilmember Gale Brewer. The housing department came out against the bill, not necessarily because it objected to the content, advocates say, but because of turf issues.

A Bird in the Hand, or Two in the Bush?

As the campaign was gaining momentum, Mayor Bloomberg appointed Shaun Donovan as commissioner of HPD. Donovan had a reputation as a forward-thinking policymaker, and ANHD groups hoped to gain his support for the TPI bill. A few weeks into Donovan's tenure, INCO held a rally on the steps of City Hall. The rally eventually moved over to HPD headquarters, where housing organizers and tenants welcomed Donovan to the job and urged him to reconsider HPD's opposition to TPI. Following the rally and the positive coverage it received in the media, Speaker Miller promised to pass the TPI bill. With the City Council poised to override the veto Mayor Bloomberg had promised, Councilmember Brewer's office called with good news: HPD wanted to negotiate. “When they saw the number of council members sponsoring the bill, that made them say, ‘We have to do something,’” Castro said. But there was a catch: HPD wanted cyclical inspections, not TPI's. On one hand, it was a great prospect—cyclical inspections were more than ANHD and its members were asking for. But entering negotiations would kill the campaign's momentum, and if negotiations broke down, organizers risked getting no change at all.

In the end, they decided to go for it. “We had the depth of experience to know that it was in our interest to step back and negotiate,” Dulchin noted. Over the next nine months, a negotiating team of ANHD members hammered out a deal with HPD. “The city put on the table a proposal that would allow council members to identify buildings in their district. It gave council members an added carrot for constituents and a stick to beat dead-beat landlords,” David Greenberg, ANHD's policy director, said. “What we wanted was follow-up: identification of buildings, timetables for repairs, and litigation.” But litigation is expensive, and HPD was loath to commit resources to it. Still, he continued, “We were able to work out a solution, and that is to the credit of HPD and Donovan's leadership.”

As negotiations waxed and waned, ANHD members were able to keep the pressure on, yet remain patient enough to stay at the negotiating table. When negotiations stalled, Greenberg recalled, it was ANHD's organiz-

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ing power that restarted things. “It was only when we threatened to walk that the proposal gained some traction. Organizing changed the pace of negotiations, and without the coordination of negotiation and organizing we wouldn’t have been able to get the commissioner to move.” ANHD used similar tactics on the City Council. Because the MOU was not legislation per se, it required the unanimous support of the Council, and the Queens delegation, led by Leroy Comrie, Jr., wavered in its support. ANHD members eventually staged a small action at the speaker’s office, pressuring him to round up support among his fellow council members. Within a few days, the Queens delegation had given its blessing and the speaker wrote to ANHD to inform them that he and Donovan would announce the agreement on the steps of City Hall. Said Dulchin, “This was a win that really speaks to the policy maturity of our members as well as their organizing strength.”

Battery Park City: A Promise Fulfilled

This past April at City Hall, Mayor Michael Bloomberg and Comptroller William S. Thompson, surrounded by a sea of tenants and housing advocates, announced a breakthrough agreement on affordable housing in New York City. After nearly three decades of false starts, financial misappropriation, and broken promises, the city was finally making good on a guarantee it made in the 1960s—that revenues from Battery Park City, a luxury housing development in Lower Manhattan, would be used to create affordable housing. Over the next four years, the city will channel \$130 million into an affordable housing trust fund, which the city plans to use to build or preserve 4,500 units of affordable housing for the poorest New Yorkers.

In making good on the city's promise to use Battery Park City revenues for affordable housing, advocates hailed the agreement as a major step towards rectifying an historic injustice. Yet contemporary politics also played a major role: The agreement gave Mayor Bloomberg an election-year boost among lower-income New Yorkers, while Comptroller Thompson solidified his progressive bona fides in anticipation of a 2008 mayoral run. For those involved in the year-long organizing campaign that preceded the deal, parsing officials' motives was beside the point. The outcome was what mattered.

Bringing History Into the Present

Affordable housing had been a part of the government-backed Battery Park City redevelopment from the very start. The 1969 master plan called for 14,100 apartments—one-third low-income, one-third middle-income, one-third conventionally financed. The apartments were intended to be on-site, but when the project fell into financial disarray in the 1970s, the provisions for low- and moderate-income housing were removed from the master plan. In exchange, the city, state, and Battery Park City Authority entered into a series of agreements that promised to channel \$1 billion towards housing development city-wide. Under the terms of the last agreement, penned in 1989, the authority committed \$600 million in future net revenues for affordable housing. The agreement also stipulated that the funds would augment, not supplant, existing city housing funds. But there was also a loophole: If the city determined that it needed funds “to maintain fiscal stability...or existing city services,” the city could divert Battery Park City revenues to other uses.

It was, as one observer put it, “a loophole big enough to drive a stadium through.” Which is exactly what Mayor Bloomberg hoped to do when he announced in March 2004 that he and the governor intended to use \$350 million of the Battery Park City money to underwrite expansion of the Javitz Center. (To be fair, every other administration had availed itself of the loophole: Of the \$1 billion committed, just \$143 million had gone towards housing.) State Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver nixed the proposed use of funds, and the city dropped the plan. But the mayor's proposal revived the possibility of the city finally fulfilling its long-dormant promise, and housing advocates began examining how to make it happen.

The task of disentangling the arcane web of financial and policy details surrounding the Battery Park City money fell to Joe Weisbord, who was then the staff director of Housing First, an umbrella organization initiated by ANHD. At Housing First's behest, the city's Independent Budget Office conducted a study of the city's use of Battery Park City funds, which found that the city used the \$600 million largely for general budget purposes.

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A broad coalition of developers, advocates, and policy experts came together to hammer out an agenda and campaign strategy.

Just as important, the IBO determined that Battery Park City would generate excess revenues of at least \$75 million each year for the foreseeable future, a portion of which was designated as “Joint Purpose Funds,” an account controlled jointly by the mayor, the city comptroller, and the Battery Park City Authority.

Melding the Brassroots With the Grassroots

The IBO report received sympathetic media coverage when it was released in June 2004. With the policy foundation in place, the challenge was now to persuade the mayor and comptroller to allocate the money for housing. Wearing his Housing First hat, Weisbord began working what he calls the “brassroots,” trying to persuade the city’s civic-minded business and political elites that affordable housing was the best use of funds. Behind the scenes, Weisbord says, bankers and opinion leaders within Housing First’s network were “softening the ground.” This effort was capped by a November 2004 press conference at which brassroots luminaries—including Sandy Frucher, president of the Philadelphia Stock Exchange and former CEO of the Battery Park City Authority; former HUD Secretary Andrew Cuomo; and numerous state and city elected officials—urged the mayor and comptroller to make good on the original promise.

While Housing First and its allies lent the campaign mainstream credibility, they weren’t in a position to apply the needed political pressure. That would come from the grassroots. A coalition of housing groups came together to hammer out an agenda and campaign strategy. Within ANHD, nonprofit housing developers and organizers agreed on the need for deep subsidies that could support preservation and development targeted to the city’s lowest-income residents, a goal shared by the Coalition for the Homeless, labor and tenant organizations. Meanwhile, New York ACORN, the local affiliate of the national community organizing group, brought crucial political muscle through its affiliation with the Working Families Party and its relationship with Comptroller Thompson.

On February 2nd, 2005, the new coalition Housing Here and Now turned out 7,000 people for a rally at City Hall. “The February rally was really a turning point,” says Julie Miles, Housing Here and Now’s lead organizer. “It was a diverse crowd—homeless people, tenants, seniors, disabled people, families and kids. It showed the mayor that this is the housing community, and it’s a community that can mobilize people.” The rally received widespread press coverage, signaling that the campaign was now in full swing.

Different Strengths, Complementary Roles

One of the strengths of the Battery Park City coalition was its breadth. Beyond the obvious show of political strength provided by sheer numbers, different coalition members were able to play different roles. Through its relationship with the Working Families Party, ACORN opened back-channel negotiations with Comptroller Thompson, providing indispensable insider leverage. Through Working Families, ACORN was able to get the New York Central Labor Council and the United Federation of Teachers on board, too. “ACORN had an important political power base through its affiliation with the Working Families Party, and they put that to work on this campaign,” Weisbord observed. Meanwhile, other coalition members provided pressure from the outside. “The challenge was to figure out how to work with someone who is a supporter but temperamentally cautious and didn’t want to slam the mayor,” said David Greenberg, ANHD’s policy director. The combination of public events and private negotiations, Greenberg noted, were intended to persuade Thompson to support the issue without strong-arming him.

In the end, however, Thompson needed a little push. As he vacillated, Speaker Gifford Miller, himself a mayoral candidate, took on the issue. On March 15th, INCO staged a mock “move-in” to Battery Park City. Scores of demonstrators showed up in pajamas and bathrobes to reclaim the promise. The press coverage generated by the move-in proved to be the tipping point: The next day Thompson privately told advocates he was ready to support the fund. Thompson sent word to the mayor that he intended to publicly endorse a housing trust fund, and the mayor signed on to the idea as well.

In the end, it took the alignment of politics, luck, and savvy organizing to move the issue. “The campaign was successful because it was able to engage both the grassroots and the brassroots,” Weisbord says. “Engaging the civic establishment gave the campaign mainstream legitimacy, but it was the grassroots organizing that created the heat.” The campaign also benefited from a number of insider-outsider relationships. ACORN’s relationship with Comptroller Thompson was a crucial leverage point, but it took outside pressure to get over the hump. Organizing also made the issue an attractive one for Mayor Bloomberg, who, with an election season coming, was eager to demonstrate that his administration was taking steps to ease the city’s affordable-housing crisis. Bloomberg also benefited from having savvy advisors: HPD Commissioner Shaun Donovan recognized the need for housing subsidies, and reportedly pushed the mayor to create a housing trust fund with the Battery Park City money.

Conclusion: The Making of a Housing Movement?

By linking neighborhood organizations together with sound policy ideas and a broader coalition of churches, labor unions, advocacy organizations, and citizen groups, these three broadly imagined city-wide campaigns have had a profound influence on New York City housing policy.

Is New York City witnessing the birth of a new progressive housing movement? It is perhaps too early to tell, but these three victories are undoubtedly auspicious. Consider the changes over the past three years. Thanks to the inclusionary zoning campaigns waged on the Far West Side and North Brooklyn, private developers are slated to produce nearly 6,900 units of affordable housing. Now that the inclusionary zoning precedent has been established, the number will likely grow as other neighborhoods are rezoned. While the T-CEP program is still in its pilot stage, it will guarantee repairs to 7,200 apartments per year—and that number, too, may well grow as the program’s success is proven. And the \$130 million Battery Park City fund will likely be a critical source of money as the city tries to preserve thousands of units of subsidized Mitchell Lama and Section 8 housing that are slated to convert to market-rate in the coming years.

Yet as the history of Battery Park City’s broken promises illustrates, housing advocates must preserve their momentum through implementation, diligent monitoring, and public watchdogging. Given the complexity of the public financing mechanisms underlying the inclusionary zoning agreements, housing groups will likely play a critical role in policing development agreements and enforcing tenant harassment and anti-displacement provisions. These are tall orders for organizations with limited resources and a growing workload. On the other hand, the T-CEP agreement institutionalizes housing organizing in a meaningful way. HPD will be relying on neighborhood groups to help identify the worst buildings and monitor code enforcement. If groups are using the program year after year, it will be hard to lose it.

Just as important as the number of units created and preserved are the political and organizational ramifications of these victories. All three were driven by grassroots organizing, which, while not sufficient in and of itself, was a necessary component. By linking neighborhood organizations together with sound policy ideas and a broader coalition of churches, labor unions, advocacy organizations, and citizen groups, these three broadly imagined city-wide campaigns have had a profound influence on New York City housing policy. If this dynamic continues to develop, the city may well have a robust housing movement capable of projecting a powerful voice in city housing policy.

Appendix A

Neighborhood Opportunities Fund and INCO Supporters as of October, 2005

Altman Foundation
Association for Neighborhood and Housing Development
Bank of New York
Bank of America
The BTM Foundation, Inc. of the Bank of Tokyo-Mitsubishi
Booth Ferris Foundation
Citibank Community Development
Deutsche Bank
The Enterprise Foundation, Inc.
Fannie Mae Foundation
The Ford Foundation
HSBC Bank USA
Independence Community Foundation
Jessie Smith Noyes Foundation*
Local Initiatives Support Corporation
M & T Bank
Merrill Lynch Community Development Company LLC
MetLife Foundation
Mizuho Corporate Bank, Ltd.
The New York Community Trust*
North Fork Bank
Robert Sterling Clark Foundation*
The J.P. Morgan Chase Foundation
The New York Community Trust
The Rockefeller Foundation*
The Rockefeller Brothers Fund*
Scherman Foundation*
Surdna Foundation
US Trust
United Way of New York City
Washington Mutual

* Provide support directly to ANHD for INCO program costs.

Appendix B:

Initiative for Neighborhood and City-Wide Organizing 2005 Grantee list

Abyssinian Development Corporation
Asian Americans for Equality (Queens office)
Centro Hispano Cuzcatlán
Erasmus Neighborhood Federation
Fifth Avenue Committee
Forest Hills Community House
Goddard-Riverside Community Center (Harlem Operation Take-Back)*
Good Old Lower East Side
Housing Conservation Coordinators
Los Sures/Southside United Housing
Make the Road by Walking
Mothers on the Move
New Settlement Apartments
NorthWest Bronx Community and Clergy Coalition
Northern Manhattan Improvement Corporation*
Pratt Area Community Council
St. Nicholas Neighborhood Preservation Corp.

* *New grantee in 2005*

ANHD Board of Directors 2005

Irma Rodriguez, *President*
Forest Hills Community House

Michelle Neugebauer, *Vice President*
Cypress Hills LDC

Carlton Collier, *Vice President*
Community Assisted Tenant Controlled Housing

Lisa-Nicolle Grist, *Treasurer*

Walter Blenman, *Secretary*
Beulah HDFC

Mark Alexander

Sarah Desmond
Housing Conservation Coordinators

Colvin Grannum
Bedford Stuyvesant Restoration Corp.

Margaret Hughes

John Reilly
Fordham Bedford Housing Corporation

Brad Lander
PICCED

David Robinson
Legal Services for New York City Legal Support Unit

Frank Lang
Asian Americans for Equality

Kim Swan
NYCHA

Barbara Lowry
Northern Manhattan Improvement Corp

Laura Tavormina
Westside Federation for Senior and
Supportive Housing

David Pagan,
Los Sures/Southside United H.D.F.C.

Advisory Committee INCO

Walter Blenman
Beulah HDFC

Lloyd Brown
Bank of New York

Steven Flax
M&T Bank

Jo Gonsalves
Affordable Housing & Homelessness Prevention

Roger Hayes
New York City Department of Health

JJ Ko
Deutsche Bank Americas Foundation

Becky Koch
HSBC USA

Brad Lander
Pratt Institute Center for Community Economic Dev.

Monica Neal
Global Funds Group
JPMorgan Private Bank

Mike Pratt
Scherman Foundation

Raun J. Rasmussen
Legal Services for New York City

John Reilly
Fordham Bedford Housing Corporation

Elizabeth Rodriguez
Federal Reserve Bank of New York

Irma Rodriguez
Forest Hills Community House

Patricia Swann
New York Community Trust



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The Making of a Movement

How Organizing is
Transforming Housing
in New York City

An INCO Organizing Case Study



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