

# THE TIME IS NOW

## Real Solutions to End NYC's Affordability Crisis



## INTRODUCTION

Housing shapes everything about our city – who gets to live here, create collective culture, and access opportunity. **But NYC’s housing systems are and have been failing – nearly all New Yorkers agree, housing in NYC is so unaffordable, it is compromising our ability to survive here.** The fault can largely be found in mayoral administration after mayoral administration failing to respond to what the city’s people have clearly and repeatedly said they need.

New Yorkers have been calling for a new commitment to housing **all** of us – a clear vision of affordability and livability that should frame our government’s policy goals and budget priorities. But instead, we have been handed plan after mayoral plan for coloring within the lines of the status quo and its misguided fundamental assumptions – that we must depend primarily on the private, for-profit real estate market to solve our housing problem; that mass homelessness is an endemic condition; that counting ever more units of new luxury housing will somehow, eventually, trickle down to address our communities’ real need for housing at the lowest income levels; that we can somehow afford to let our existing affordable housing crumble, but can’t afford to invest in preserving it for the future.

Cover photo credit: Cameron Blaylock

The consequences of this failed approach cannot be ignored. The statistics are staggering and the stories even more devastating.

Over **100,000** NYers have been evicted since 2016 and evictions are now increasing again after a pause during the pandemic<sup>1</sup>.

More than **300,000** New Yorkers don't have homes, including **146,000** children<sup>2</sup>.

**1/3** of all NYC renters pay more than **1/2** their income toward their rent, while half of the city's households do not have enough money for housing, food, basic health care and to get around.

**35%** of NYC's renting households are earning under **\$42,000** a year<sup>3</sup> -with about **3/4** of them paying more than half their income on rent<sup>4</sup>.

The greatest harms disproportionately impact the lowest-income and most marginalized New Yorkers.

<sup>1</sup> Coalition for the Homeless, et al [Housing is the Solution: A Plan to End Mass Homelessness in NYC](#)

<sup>2</sup> Fahy, Claire "1 in 8 NYC Public School Students Was Homeless Last Year", New York Times, November 14, 2024

<sup>3</sup> ANHD, [City Budget Testimony Before the Housing and Buildings Committee](#), March 25, 2025. Cited figure is for a household of 3; the ELI income category ceiling ranges from \$32,650 for an individual to \$61,550 for a household of 8, according to ANHD's [2024 AMI Cheat Sheet](#)

<sup>4</sup> Coalition for the Homeless, et al [Housing is the Solution: A Plan to End Mass Homelessness in NYC](#)

It is time to squarely acknowledge the magnitude of the problem, and for mayoral leadership to stop muting the voices of what residents know they need – deep community partnerships, political will, and enough resources to make the vision a reality.

This platform does not prescribe detailed policy recommendations. Past Administrations have gotten fixated on putting in place a watered-down version of isolated policies with diminishing impacts. But the North Star must be to transform New Yorkers' lives so that we can not only survive but thrive in all of our communities - and we should be ready to develop, fund, and implement the full range of tools needed to reach that goal. This platform calls for setting - and then measuring progress towards - goals across four broad categories. In each of these categories, we uplift the proven and well-known solutions that have either been deprioritized in favor of real estate interests or simply deprived of adequate funding because of top-down decision-making. We must prioritize the actual housing affordability needs of most New Yorkers - even though that's harder to finance than a trickle down approach. We call for a renewed commitment to reduce racial disparities, ensure fairness, and build a fairer and more equitable New York - despite a federal government that is attacking the very notion of fair housing. And we call for a commitment to prioritize the voices of low-income, BIPOC, immigrant, and other marginalized New Yorkers as active partners in shaping our neighborhoods and our city - even though it's easier to work with and through entrenched power players.

**The decades-long approach of reformist, tinkering-around-the-edges to get affordable housing must come to an end.** Community-driven participation has been clear in demanding and developing effective and holistic solutions, and now is the time to resource them.

## THE NEXT MAYOR MUST:

1. Enable people to stay in the communities and homes they love
  - a. Prevent tenant harassment and displacement
  - b. Preserve and improve our existing affordable housing
2. Create pathways to permanent housing for all
  - a. Create new 100% affordable and supportive housing that matches real need
  - b. Prioritize and preserve sources of deeply affordable and accessible housing
  - c. Address roadblocks and expand programs to re-house people
3. Maximize public land and public resources for public good
  - a. Use public land and zoning authority to maximize affordability
  - b. Invest in community institutions and infrastructure
4. Center fairness and equal opportunity across all housing policies and programs
  - a. Ensure equal access to and expand homeownership opportunities
  - b. Aggressively pursue a Fair Housing agenda

# 1. Enable people to stay in the homes and communities they love

In a city with skyrocketing housing costs, our existing affordable housing is a bulwark that keeps the city accessible, creates access to opportunity, and makes survival in the city possible for millions who would otherwise be priced out. But for too long, the city has hemorrhaged affordable units through deregulation brought about by tenant harassment, landlord neglect, government disinvestment, and insufficient enforcement. Though 2019's hard-fought improvements to our rent stabilization laws marked a significant milestone, without intentional, broad-based action, many affordable units are at growing risk of being lost forever. We have lost numerous federally and state subsidized buildings to the market. And our public housing is in dire condition. And many more affordable buildings are now at risk due to rising operating costs, rental arrears, and lack of refinance options.

To address the crisis, the next mayor must adopt a “No Affordable Units Lost” stance – and allocate the resources across multiple strategies to ensure that the city retains and improves its existing affordable housing. We must be laser-focused on keeping people in their homes, where success is measured by meeting the real needs of vulnerable people, not an abstract unit count. We must be committed to the long-term viability and accessibility of our affordable housing stock for both current and future generations of New Yorkers.

To do this, there must be a dual focus on reducing and combating the pressures that drive people out of their neighborhoods and on preserving the most deeply affordable units in the system. We need to commit both operating and capital resources so that public housing, subsidized housing, and rent stabilized housing remain affordable, healthy, and resilient in the face of a changing economic and climate landscape.



## A. Combat Tenant Harassment and Displacement

Displacement pressure from real estate speculation and harassment by landlords seeking to benefit from rising land values threaten vulnerable tenants and overall housing stability in communities. Community organizing, legal defense and accompanying protections, lending practices, and administrative enforcement all have a role to play in stemming displacement.

Tenant harassment is one of the most powerful and pernicious ways that bad landlords seek to accomplish the goal of maximizing profits. Tenants who are already living on the verge of homelessness due to constrained incomes; those with marginalized identities of any type -- racial, sexual, cultural, religious, and linguistic, for example; and people with an age, family, criminal justice, or immigration status that already is a source of fear are disproportionately subject to poor conditions and especially vulnerable to harassment. Threats and intimidation, unjustified eviction cases, and failure to provide necessary repairs or utilities are but some of the ways that landlords can seek to evade their financial responsibility or force residents out. These tactics isolate tenants and prevent them from fighting back. Inefficiency and ineffectiveness of the agencies and courts intended to enforce safety and anti-harassment laws places added risks and burdens on already vulnerable tenants, and an unsuccessful experience attempting to stand up for one's rights can lead tenants to despair, to resign themselves to unsafe and unfair conditions, or to move out entirely. And in the worst instances, lives are lost when longstanding problems result in building fires or collapse. Tenant organizing and collective action along with robust, strategic, and proactive enforcement are essential to shifting this pattern.

### THE NEXT MAYOR MUST:

- I **Provide robust resources for community-based organizations (CBOs)** to organize tenants, teach tenant rights, support eligible tenants to enroll in rent-freeze programs, and provide individual and collective housing counseling services.
- I **Invest in proven eviction prevention programs** such as Right to Counsel legal assistance, one-shot programs, and direct resources to those whose rights are being violated or who are facing evictions.
- I **Proactively and aggressively enforce Housing and Buildings codes** to ensure that the protections outlined in the law are realized in practice and prevent problems from escalating.
- I **Strategically apply serious penalties when engaging with bad-acting landlords**, with a goal of building the city's leverage to pursue ownership changes if landlords don't make substantial and lasting improvements to bring their buildings into legal compliance.

## B. Preserve and improve affordable housing

### 1. INVEST IN NYC'S AT-RISK SUBSIDIZED AND STABILIZED HOUSING

Affordable housing providers' portfolios are in crisis due to operating gaps, derived from surging costs for operating and maintaining buildings, outstanding arrears from the acute hardships of the pandemic, and decreased collection rates, a byproduct of the economic strain that our city's lowest-income tenants face. Nonprofit housing providers, who play a crucial role in maintaining affordable rents as well as much-needed services in communities throughout New York, are particularly vulnerable because their portfolios are exclusively made up of deeply affordable housing, they have historically been ineligible for the same developer fees for-profit providers have collected, and they have extended themselves to the limit to provide for their residents' and broader communities needs throughout the pandemic.

Furthermore, many of the city's affordable housing units are found in the oldest buildings, some of which have also been neglected due to structural disinvestment. Deferred maintenance and outdated building systems create mounting expenses and hazards that require intervention before they compromise overall viability. Upgrades to efficient and modern systems are sorely needed to support healthy indoor environments for residents and to lower emissions externally. These reduce costs for tenants, landowners, and homeowners alike while improving the local environment and advancing climate goals. Investments should be geared toward long term affordability and responsible stewardship of affordable housing stock.

### THE NEXT MAYOR MUST:

#### I **Stabilize non-profit owned affordable housing**

- I **Create and resource consistent operating subsidy streams** through traditional and innovative methods to support sustainable housing options for the lowest income New Yorkers.
- I **Create and resource flexible debt relief** to allow CDCs to prioritize their most financially strained properties, based on portfolio-level debt rather than individual units. This can include bridge funding assistance and forgivable loans.

#### I **Create new financing options and opportunities to rehabilitate and upgrade building systems** for health, safety, affordability, and sustainability.

#### I **Create and resource programs to enable preservation purchases** or other forms of ownership transfer away from consistent bad actors.

#### I **Create new financing options and opportunities to restructure debt** for financial stability, building on successful examples for different types of building stock, across the full range from small homes to large multi-family buildings.

## 2. COMMIT TO AND INTEGRATE PUBLIC HOUSING INTO PRESERVATION PLANS

Complexes built as public housing are home to more than 350,000 New Yorkers, and these units make up more than 7% of NYC's rental housing stock. The average household income of a public housing family is \$25,000 a year, with an average rent of \$588 a month<sup>5</sup>. Simply put, NYCHA provides an indispensable source of affordable housing for the city's lowest income residents, and it is a source upon which the entire affordable housing ecosystem of the city is dependent.

### THE NEXT MAYOR MUST:

- I **Treat public housing as part of the City's responsibility**, as demonstrated through direct funding, lobbying, and programmatic investments to ensure that units are preserved and conditions are improved to meet health, safety, and environmental standards.
- I **Advocate to ensure that public housing stays publicly controlled** – to make sure it remains an indispensable source of deeply affordable housing in perpetuity.
- I **Respect, create, and resource systems through which the perspectives, wisdom, and will of public housing residents can be heard and heeded**, through processes that facilitate meaningful engagement, provide independent assistance, and foster legitimate resident decision-making with genuine power.

<sup>5</sup> [New York City Housing Authority 2025 Fact Sheet](#)



## 2. Create pathways to permanent housing for all

A staggering 350,000 New Yorkers are without homes. Roughly 125,000 people sleep in shelters, over 200,000 are overcrowded in others' apartments, and thousands more are unsheltered. The scale of homelessness is a long-term, systemic issue - a direct result of exorbitant rents and a severe shortage of housing that low-income families can afford. Long-term shelter dwellers grew by 12% in the last year, even as new arrivals to the system decrease<sup>6</sup>.

At the same time, the vacancy rate for low-rent apartments is near zero, voucher need far outpaces availability, and unnecessary hurdles to housing access remain. The next mayor must create more affordable housing for people who are unhoused and those on the brink of homelessness – by prioritizing creating 100% affordable and supportive housing for those who need it most – those with incomes under \$45,000 a year, including families, senior citizens, people with disabilities, people attempting to re-integrate into the city after incarceration, households experiencing homelessness, and people in need of supportive housing. To tackle this most pressing of problems, the next mayor must:

### A. Create new 100% affordable housing that matches real need

**I Build 100% affordable housing, with substantive percentages at the deepest levels of affordability.** To build the kind of affordable housing New York City really needs, we need not only more resources but different types of financial tools. For decades, the city's affordable housing financing has been largely limited to capital resources. But this limitation makes it impossible to sustain rent levels low enough to serve the need. While continuing to invest capital dollars, we must bring back and expand models for providing ongoing operating subsidies, whether through project-based vouchers, a wider range of service contracts, subsidies for costs like insurance and utilities, or similar alternatives.

<sup>6</sup> Coalition for the Homeless, et al [Housing is the Solution: A Plan to End Mass Homelessness in NYC](#), page 2

**I Build deeply affordable housing at the size that families need, expanding the definition of household type.**

- I Explore additional term sheets to diversify the types and size of housing built.
- I Implement intergenerational housing models and otherwise reduce access barriers for households not based on a nuclear family archetype.

**B. Prioritize and preserve sources of deeply affordable and accessible housing:**

- I Prioritize homeless households for federal housing resources**, through public housing and Section 8 vouchers.
- I Fulfill and expand commitments to approaches that have been proven** to create housing access, such as supportive housing, Safe Haven and stabilization beds.

**C. Address unnecessary roadblocks and expand programs to re-house people**

- I Expand, implement, and streamline the CityFHEPS voucher program** in accordance with the 2023 laws. Robust baseline and voucher funding are needed to overcome staffing and logistical challenges and ensure that more vouchers can be distributed and used effectively.
- I Eliminate obstacles to affordable housing access** by improving Housing Connect as well as address barriers that arise in the re-rental lease-up process. The reduction of wait times, timely, accurate communication and the simplification of applications should be priorities.

### 3. Maximize public land and public resources for public good

The City has tremendous public powers upon which it must capitalize to ensure that all New Yorkers are housed. No opportunity should be missed, from ensuring that public land and land review processes are leveraged to advance the greatest public benefit to fully supporting nonprofit community-based organizations (CBOs) in their mission to advance the public good, which they accomplish by providing deep, long-term affordable housing, protecting tenants, strengthening community bonds, and meeting neighborhood needs.

Public land is a valuable and limited resource that creates the greatest opportunity to advance the City's affordability agenda. For too long, City policy has relinquished public assets by offering sweetheart deals or otherwise stacking the deck to allow for-profit developers to shape projects according to their private interests, thereby squandering possibilities to promote the common good. Instead, when the City ensures that public land is transferred to a mission-driven or collective entity, its use aligns with the public interest. Likewise, planning decisions and rezoning proposals hold the greatest potential to shape both neighborhoods and the city as a whole to tackle our most pressing affordability needs, if only they were designed to realize that imperative.

Similarly, nonprofit CBOs play a unique and critical role in advancing the public good. They provide the community infrastructure and programming that foster community connection. In the realm of affordable housing development, CDCs perform an unparalleled function that has been shown to achieve deeper and long-term affordability, generating the greatest benefit to communities. These efforts, informed by and at the behest of community members, are a collective benefit in themselves, especially due to their exceptional outcomes with low-income, BIPOC, and immigrant communities. The incomparable value that CDCs add is the reason members of the growing Community Land Trust (CLT) movement routinely seek them out as partners in fulfilling collective ownership goals.

## A. Optimize public land, financing, and land use powers for public benefit

City-owned and public sites, by definition, offer the City the most control over the outcomes of development, and the City must prioritize maximizing public benefit through these projects. Over the last several decades, public land available for housing development has grown more scarce, imbuing the remaining sites with an even greater responsibility to deliver on their potential for public value. Through the land disposition process, the City can set the levels and other terms of affordability that the development must reach, and select the entity most aligned with achieving those goals well past the development phase.

The level of benefit for the City and its local neighborhoods created by affordable housing should be measured by who can access the units and whether they are being created for our most vulnerable neighbors. This principle holds on public land and through the mechanisms of public financing for development and preservation. Similarly, by treating development projects as discrete, localized projects, the City has also failed to capitalize on its planning and land use powers to drive toward a comprehensive set of equity goals to which all neighborhoods must contribute. Coordinating uses of public sites, financing, and comprehensive planning will reap the greatest benefit for the public.

### THE NEXT MAYOR MUST:

- I **Maximize housing affordability on public land.** The City should require that all housing developed on public land be 100% affordable, in perpetuity.
- I **Prioritize community-based, mission-driven nonprofits** when disposing of public land, rather than for-profit developers, to keep land and housing permanently affordable, advance community-led development, and ensure better outcomes over the long-term.
- I **Implement Comprehensive Planning** that brings together citywide imperatives with community-level visions, to coordinate land use and zoning decisions for public priorities rather than piecemeal private interests.

## B. Fully support mission-driven, nonprofit community-based organizations to deepen public benefit

Investment in the long-term capacity of community-based organizations (CBOs) is investment in both human and physical community infrastructure that ignites an upward cycle of increased benefits that further accrue over time. Community-based organizations provide the services, resources, spaces, and, of course, housing that New Yorkers need to not only survive but thrive. Their work facilitates the strong community connections that underpin healthy neighborhoods, which are the building blocks of a humane and just city.

CBOs are vital public infrastructure. They are the places where neighbors gather; they house and run afterschool programs; they connect elders to friendly volunteers and other resources, to name just a fraction of the ways they knit communities together and strengthen our interdependence as a city.

In affordable housing infrastructure, CDCs fill gaps in the ecosystem to ensure that the intended outcomes of programs designed for public benefit actually achieve their aims. They tackle the challenging zero-profit deals that preserve desperately needed affordable housing, and as major swaths of the city's affordable housing teeter on the cliff of an expiring affordability crisis, it has been CDCs, rather than their for-profit counterparts, who have shown the greatest commitment and ingenuity for staving off losses, not their for-profit partners.

Current systems fail to take the extraordinary additional value that CBOs and CDCs create into account. Through alignment with community values, longevity of affordable housing, and reinvestment of resources when their balance sheets produce a surplus, CDCs deliver comprehensive benefits for the public that extend far beyond the walls of their buildings.

We need a strong community-based nonprofit sector – replete with the infrastructure to support it. Chronic underfunding of community based organizations and persistent delays in the City's contracting and payment processes hampers program operations, which places workers and community members at risk. Likewise, favoring the short-term expediency of relying on for-profit developers over the benefit of deeper affordability, permanence, and community accountability undermines our communities' long term resilience. We must reverse this downward cycle that deprives communities of added value.

## THE NEXT MAYOR MUST:

- I **Support and build capacity for nonprofit organizations** in the affordable housing sector, through resources that support preservation and development projects, staffing, and vital preservation services in neighborhoods most at risk of displacement.
- I **Address the delays in City contracting** for CDCs and community-based non-profit organizations so that nonprofits can continue their essential work, including transitioning to a grant-based model, which would substantially improve cash flow for nonprofits and reduce the City's administrative burden.
- I **Streamline and expedite nonprofit affordable housing deals** to prevent escalating costs and delays. Projects initiated by CDCs should be designated high priority and supported by intentional coordination among agencies to facilitate completion.
- I **Correct eligibility and scoring systems for awarding Requests for Proposals (RFPs)** to recognize and affirm the strengths that mission-driven developers bring to the development process and to remove structural biases against CDCs.



## 4. Center fairness and equal opportunity in all housing policies and programs

### A. Expand and ensure equal access to homeownership opportunities

Homeownership is an essential component of ensuring access to quality housing and opportunities to build wealth, especially for Black and Latino households, who are less likely than white families to gain wealth from multiple assets. Yet the home equity racial wealth gap in New York City remains staggeringly high, with the median value of home equity among white city homeowners about twice that of Black homeowners, 1.5 times that of Latino homeowners, and 1.2 times that of Asian homeowners<sup>7</sup>. While this disparity is due to a cumulative set of factors, exclusionary zoning continues to sharply narrow opportunities for BIPOC homeownership. At the same time, black and brown households who manage to overcome initial barriers are disproportionately vulnerable to wealth stripping attacks perpetrated through predatory lending, fraud, and the sale of tax liens.

#### THE NEXT MAYOR MUST:

- I **Expand the individual and cooperative homeownership opportunities** that are available to lower income households through targeted programs, as well as specific preservation, development, and land use opportunities.
- I **Fund homeownership counseling**, which enables prospective homeowners to better access opportunity and manage their investments, and prevents wealth-stripping crimes like fraud and deed theft.
- I **Equip CBOs to provide homeownership counseling and integrated community** services in convenient locations, with staff who can ensure cultural and linguistic relevance.
- I **Provide robust resources for programs that lower the entry barrier** to homeownership, such as assistance with down payments, vouchers, and zoning reforms.

<sup>7</sup> Parra, Daniel "[Tale of Two Cities: Report Finds Stark Racial Wealth Gap Among New Yorkers](#)" City Limits, February 6, 2025

## B. Aggressively pursue a Fair Housing agenda

The disproportionate burden of poor quality, dangerous, and expensive housing that BIPOC residents endure, as well as the discrimination they and others with marginalized identities face are the predictable outcomes of decades of planning decisions that only served to reinforce racial and economic disparities. The next mayor must place the needs of marginalized communities front and center in the City's policy, budgeting, and land use decisions to build on Fair Housing foundations and aggressively address accountability and enforceability.

### THE NEXT MAYOR MUST:

- I **Increase affordable housing production in low affordability community districts.**
- I **Focus preservation and anti-displacement resources** in high displacement risk community districts.
- I **Strengthen accountability and reporting**, especially to assess how different groups are faring and calibrate policy accordingly to best meet real need.
- I **Combat discrimination based on source of income and other characteristics by fully funding the City Commission on Human Rights.** This would facilitate greater capacity to test, investigate, and enforce against discriminatory practices by appraisers, lenders, brokers, and others, as well as to offer more education to those seeking housing.
- I **Robustly enforce anti-discrimination and fair housing laws** at every opportunity.

## CONCLUSION

New York City is fortunate to have an extensive understanding of the policies and programs needed to address the affordable housing crisis once and for all, paired with an energetic housing movement ready to implement a vision of housing as a human right. We possess an array of solutions to address our detailed understanding of who is most acutely underserved and in greatest need. What we have lacked is the leadership, commitment, and resources to make real progress on the most significant challenges.

The next mayoral administration must commit to making an impact that everyday New Yorkers can feel. Unit counts and press releases mean nothing to the masses of struggling New Yorkers trying to get through the month. People's lives are changed by having a safe, healthy, and truly affordable place to live and the next mayor must be wholly committed to investing at unprecedented levels across the range of solutions described here, to make substantial and tangible progress.

There is no clever workaround or splashy silver bullet that will solve the affordability crisis for us. It is a matter of declaring housing as a priority and following through with the meaningful community partnerships, political will, and financial resources to demonstrate that commitment. This is what we are calling on the next mayor to do.