

NYC community land initiative



Fighting for vibrant, equitable and sustainable housing and neighborhoods through community ownership of land

2016 Policy Recommendations

NYCCLI's housing and community development policy recommendations for New York City are:

1. Incorporate the following core principles into all new and existing programs:

- **Affordability for low- and extremely-low income households.** Current methods for developing affordable housing shut out those most in need.
- **Permanent affordability that can be enforced.** We must ensure that the resources we spend today on affordable housing keep working many decades from now.
- **Community-led planning, development, and preservation** to maximize the provision of stable housing for New Yorkers excluded from the housing market.
- **Fair Housing.** Equal opportunities to access affordable housing for all New Yorkers.

2. Re-define "affordable." Current methods of calculating affordability are based on the Area Median Income (AMI) for New York City and some of its wealthy suburbs, as defined by the Department of Housing & Urban Development. As a result, most "affordable" housing is not, in fact, affordable to many New Yorkers, including people who are homeless, low-wage workers, or those living on fixed incomes. The City should instead calculate affordability based on the lower of the median income in a Community District where a project is located or the AMI.

3. Use city-owned property as a resource to promote housing development and preservation for the lowest income New Yorkers. City-owned property is the single most valuable resource to create housing for low- and extremely-low income people. The City has a critical responsibility and opportunity to prioritize the disposition of city-owned vacant properties for truly affordable housing:

- Prioritize CLTs for disposition of city-owned properties.
- Ensure that housing created on formerly city-owned properties is and will remain affordable to the existing residents of the neighborhood.
- Issue a moratorium on the disposition of city-owned properties in East Harlem and other communities with existing or actively developing CLTs. These properties, both vacant and occupied, could form critical components of these new CLTs.

4. Establish a Vacant Property Registry and Count. Vacant properties, which frequently remain empty and contribute to neighborhood blight while owners wait for development opportunities, could be used for affordable housing and other community uses. The City does not currently have a database for tracking vacant properties and is unable to develop an appropriate plan for addressing vacancy.

- A vacant property registry and count should include the requirement that property owners and mortgage-holders register vacant property with the City and state a reason for the

vacancy. Escalating fines for failure to register which, if left unpaid, will become liens that the City can enforce through *in rem* foreclosure and transfer to third parties, such as CLTs.

- The registry should be published on Open Data NYC.
- The City should create a community reporting mechanism to enable the public to report vacant properties in their communities.
- Prioritize census/property count in neighborhoods with high concentrations of vacancy.
- Develop programs to restore vacant properties to active uses that contribute to the supply of affordable housing for low income New Yorkers and to community resources.

5. Use the Third Party Transfer program to create and preserve permanently affordable housing for very low income people and community resources.

- Prioritize CLTs and nonprofit developers for TPT and require permanent affordability for buildings moving through the program.
- Broaden the pool of properties in TPT to include non-distressed properties.
- Use the Alternative Enforcement Program to cluster troubled buildings by neighborhood and transfer them to CLTs.

6. Divert funds currently spent on emergency shelter to permanent housing. Currently, the City spends more than \$3,000 per month to shelter a homeless household. This is five to six times average operating costs for a nonprofit rental apartment, and the money often creates significant profits for private shelter providers. A subsidy program for housing in permanently affordable apartments should be developed to improve the efficiency and use of these funds.

7. Refrain from approving rezonings without significant, enforceable anti-harassment protections in place.

8. Create a housing trust fund with a dedicated revenue stream to support the creation and preservation of permanently affordable housing for the lowest income New Yorkers. We must invest more in housing for New Yorkers who are most in need of housing and have the least political capital. To address this gap, the City should create a housing trust fund, supported by a dedicated revenue stream generated by increasing the property taxes on vacant and luxury properties.

9. Clarify tax assessment policy for land owned by a CLT and improvements on that land. Ensure that people and entities leasing land from a CLT are not taxed on the value of the land.