by {ga=rwebber}
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Mayor Michael Bloomberg's five-year plan (In pdf format) to increase affordable housing in New York City, officially began July 1, the first day of the new fiscal year. The administration's strategy, unveiled last December, was to preserve 38,000 units of affordable housing, and build 27,000 others, with a total of $3 billion. In May, Bloomberg offered the New York State Affordable Housing Conference an update on the plan, reporting that things were shaping up well.

"We're already moving forward on virtually every single element of The New Housing Marketplace plan," he said. "Since last December we've put the rehabilitation and production of approximately 8,000 housing units into the pipeline. We've assembled city-owned tracts for creating hundreds more. We're developing regulatory reforms that will speed private housing construction. And we're targeting residential rezoning that will catalyze construction and rehabilitation throughout the city."

While the city's budget woes haven't made the mayor's goals any easier, he has remained staunch in his housing commitment. "It's true that we won't see some of the dividends from our housing plan for years to come," he said. "Given the city's current budget problems, some people may think that's a luxury we can't afford now. That's exactly wrong. Building for the future is a responsibility we can't shirk â€" especially now."

LESS THAN PROMISED

Recently, Housing First! , a coalition of community, business, civic, labor, and religious organizations promoting affordable housing, released a report (in pdf format) on the mayor's plan that compared it to their own proposed solution to the city's affordable housing crisis. The coalition has called for a 10-year, $10 billion dollar plan that would produce 100,000 new homes and preserve at least 85,000 more. Their report suggests that the mayor's plan moves in the right direction, though not far enough.

" The mayor has made an important new commitment and that is a critical step forward," said

Joe Weisbord, staff director of Housing First!. “But, at the same time, the city’s housing situation continues to deteriorate. We need to look to the future when the economy and budget situation will improve. We see the plan that our coalition came up with as a good benchmark for the level of effort that’s going to be necessary in the long term.”

Most distressing to Housing First! is the drop in the city’s 10-year capital strategy commitment to housing. “ If you compare it to the strategy that was issued two years ago,” Weisbord pointed out, “city capital funds declined over a billion dollars for a ten-year time frame. That’s a product of these across-the-board cuts that the city has been making, but that means we continue to fall behind.”

While the city’s billion dollar capital cut is offset in part by an influx of funds from the Housing Development Corporation
and from the
Lower Manhattan Development Corporation
, the capital inflow for housing over the next ten years is still more than three-quarters of a billion dollars less than what was planned two years ago.

DISAPPOINTMENT IN DOWNTOWN

Another unhappy surprise for affordable housing advocates has been the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation’s plans for housing near the former site of the World Trade Center. Overall, the federal tax-free Liberty Bond program (In pdf format) allocates up to $1.6 billion for residential rental development, but so far, only $50 million will go toward apartments that are affordable to those learning less than Wall Street wages. The amount is very far from the $293 million proposed by Mayor Bloomberg last December, in his “
21st Century Vision for Lower Manhattan
.”

So as it now stands, thousands of apartments will soon go up in lower Manhattan, and only 300 will be affordable to moderate income families, those earning between $50,000 and $85,000 a year. And so far, there has been no Liberty Bond commitment to housing for New Yorkers earning less than $50,000 per year.

Affordable housing advocates still have faith in the Bloomberg administration's commitment to improve the city's housing situation. But there is disappointing news.. Homeless statistics are at a record high, vacancy rates painfully low. A new study (in pdf format) out from the Citizen's Housing and Planning Council estimates that well over 100,000 households counted in the 2000 Census were illegal additions to existing housing structures, attesting to the city's dire need for additional housing, and one black market solution.

" That's a measure of how poorly we're serving the population with our existing level of commitment to housing," said Weisbord. "And an indication of how serious the situation is."

From all outward appearances, Mayor Bloomberg seems determined to do something about it. "We are not going to push our problems, or our responsibilities, off on our children," he told the New York State Affordable Housing Conference. "New York City has been down that road before -- during the fiscal crisis of the 1970s -- and we know exactly where it leads. We're still paying the price for that mistake. We won't make it again."

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