



Notes

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Housing as a Priority in the Next City Administration

Less than two months ago, our City was headed into a mayoral primary where housing, along with education and crime, was one of the top issues. The citywide *Housing First!* coalition had gained momentum and housing advocates were eagerly anticipating a new administration's friendliness towards affordable housing. Financing was to come from World Trade Center and Battery Park City tax revenues.

What happened that fateful September day impacts our City in so many ways, known and unknown. Affordable housing may not still be first, but it cannot be forgot-

ten. The source of funds and the timing may not be the same, but the need for affordable housing support is even greater subsequent to September 11.

The next chance to support housing comes on November 7 with the mayoral election, when Democrat Mark Green opposes Republican Michael Bloomberg. Information on the candidates and their stands on affordable housing, both prior to and following September 11, can be found at www.unhp.org. For more information on the *Housing First!* coalition, visit www.housingfirst.net, and don't forget to vote!

Keeping the Federal Housing Agenda Going

Reflecting the importance of keeping attention focused on the federal housing agenda, the Enterprise Foundation has issued a sign-on statement entitled *Now More Than Ever, All Americans Need a Place to Call Home*. The short statement closes with the following words: "Now more than ever, the undersigned organizations and individuals commit their resources and energies to addressing America's affordable housing challenges. Working together, we will enlist the support of our thousands of individual, corporate, philanthropic and government partners all across the country in our efforts. Now more than ever, in a less certain world, we will do our part to keep America strong and united--at home." You can sign onto the statement at the foundation's website at www.enterprisefoundation.org.

At the same time, Congress is considering a number of bills including differing versions of an economic stimulus package as well as the HUD appropriations bill. Both of these bills will affect funding of affordable housing programs.

The stimulus package promises to include numerous tax breaks and incentives for businesses. With all the rebuilding that needs to occur, affordable housing must not be overlooked in the final package. A number of Senators have sent a letter to Majority Leader Daschle (D-SD) urging him to include housing in any package, and the National Low Income Housing Coalition is urging

others to contact their senators. More information is available at www.nlihc.org.

Support also continues to build in Congress for a National Housing Trust Fund. This fund would serve as an ongoing source of revenue for the production, preservation and/or rehabilitation of affordable low-income housing. The initial goal of producing, rehabilitating and preserving 1,500,000 units of housing by 2010 has been set by the National Housing Trust Fund Campaign. The trust fund should be capitalized with ongoing, permanent, dedicated and sufficient sources of revenue including excess FHA and Ginnie Mae revenue. In the House, *HR 2349* currently has 80 co-sponsors and in the Senate, *S 1248* has 17 co-sponsors. For more information, visit www.nhtf.org.

Housing advocates will also recall that the Millennial Housing Commission has just completed its hearings in five cities across the nation including New York. The commission will be making recommendations to Congress by March of 2002, and housing advocates are hoping it will lead to innovative programs to develop more low-income housing. For more information on the commission, visit www.mhc.gov.

Those interested in contacting their congressional representatives can do so easily at www.congress.org.

Section 8 Battle Continues in Congress

Even before September 11, the battle over Section 8 and HUD funding in Congress was shaping up to be difficult for affordable housing advocates. The budget surplus had already been disappearing due to the slowing economy and the large tax cut earlier this year.

Now, as more and more dollars head toward the war in Afghanistan, adequate funding for HUD and Section 8 is placed in even greater jeopardy. While the government's total budget authority has just been increased, HUD/VA appears to be alone in having its budget authority slashed nonetheless.

The appropriation bills were scheduled to be signed into law at the beginning of October, but a continuing resolution bill has been enacted while Congress tries to find time to allocate our nation's program dollars. Both the House and Senate have approved their own versions of the HUD/VA appropriations bill and the conference committee is currently meeting to reconcile a number of differences.

Four "Rs" included in the bills -- Reductions, Reserves and Recissions/Recaptures -- could be damaging measures for the Section 8 program.

Reductions: The House version of the bill provides for 34,000 new vouchers and the Senate only 25,000 (8,000 of which are designated for disabled persons). Last year, Congress funded 87,000 new vouchers. This reduction of some 70% comes despite the fact that the voucher program is the leading source of federal housing assistance for extremely low-income families.

Reserves: Both House and Senate versions cut Section 8 reserves in half from \$1.28 billion to \$640 million, reducing available reserves from a two month supply to one month for each Public Housing Authority (PHA). These reserve dollars have provided additional funds to PHAs, and a 50% cut could reduce the number of families they can serve. PHAs could deal with the cut, say some housing advocates, but only if it is implemented in a manner that allows those needing more than one month of reserves the ability to access additional funds.

This could be accomplished by centralizing a limited amount of additional reserve funds by recapturing unused voucher funds more frequently (currently done annually) from PHAs that do not need them and then using these recaptures to create and replenish a central

fund. So far, there is no mention of any kind of centralized fund in the bills.

Recissions/Recaptures: The unused Section 8 funds HUD collects from PHAs and expired contracts with private owners each year usually help HUD in the coming year, but the Senate version includes an open-ended transfer of future recaptures of unused funds from FY2002 and prior years to other programs. Only 20% of recaptured funds would go to other housing programs, while the other 80% would go to other agencies, primarily NASA. This rescission/recapture sets the stage for a serious funding strain in the voucher program and possibly the project-based Section 8 program as well. If HUD does not have sufficient funds to make adjustments in private owners' contracts when they encounter unanticipated cost increases, such as the recent escalation of utility bills or rising insurance, more owners may decide to opt out of the Section 8 program.

Both the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities and the National Low Income Housing Coalition are urging housing advocates to contact their elected officials urging them to increase HUD and Section 8 funding and revise the changes mentioned above.

Section 8 Assistance Needed for Victims

Community and housing organizations are calling on the federal government to make an emergency allocation of Section 8 rent certificates to eligible workers who have lost their jobs as a direct result of the September 11 disaster.

Real estate managers around the City are becoming aware of people who have lost their jobs as a result of the World Trade Center attack. A special set aside by the federal government would provide critically needed assis-

tance to such people quickly. Those interested in supporting this idea can contact:

- Senator Charles Schumer
(202) 224-6542
senator@schumer.senate.gov
- Senator Hillary Clinton
(202) 224-4451
senator@clinton.senate.gov
- President George W. Bush
(202) 456-1414
president@whitehouse.gov

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and is available online at
www.unhp.org

Please direct comments,
suggestions and questions to:

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Welfare Time Limits Begin In One Year; Comments Sought

The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act, more commonly known as welfare reform, was passed in 1996 and funded through October 2002. At that time, less than one year from now, the five year lifetime limits on assistance will begin taking effect.

Last month, the Beck Institute on Religion and Poverty at Fordham University published a primer on Welfare Reform to help inform the debate in the coming year about the next phase of legislative activity around welfare reform. The im-

portance of being well informed on matters affected by government budgets is even greater now as the limited resources of the government are stretched to meet growing security and emergency needs.

The Bush administration is also currently seeking comments on the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) program, the main cash assistance program created by welfare reform. The Enterprise Foundation is urging people closest to the real-world impacts of a worsening economic downturn and an already overburdened social safety net to contact

policy makers regarding TANF and other related programs. You can submit your comments electronically at www.acf.dhhs.gov/programs/ofa/.

Six Year Grievance Period Restored

On October 23, Governor Pataki signed into law legislation that effectively overturns a 1999 NYC Water Board decision to reduce the customer grievance period from six to two years. The bill had passed the state legislature unanimously earlier this year thanks in part to groups interested in water and sewer issues from around the City. These groups had been fighting the Water Board policy change and pushing legislation at the state level for the past two years.

Organizations including UNHP had pointed out that many times customers do not discover errors within a two year period and that consumers should not be denied refunds on overpaid or erroneous bills simply because they failed to find the error in less than two years. The decision is too recent to determine the immediate impact on DEP's billing practices.

EPA Fines Owners on Lead Violations

In August, the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) announced that it had cited three real estate companies in New York for failure to provide renters or buyers with information about possible lead hazards in apartments and homes. The EPA is seeking \$160,000 in fines from the three companies.

Under federal law, families have the right to know whether there are any potential lead paint hazards in a prospective home and must be informed about the harm that lead can cause.

Owners must disclose any known lead-based paint and any hazards in the home and provide any available reports. They must also provide copies of the EPA pamphlet, *Protect Your Family From Lead in Your Home*. The EPA alleged that these owners did not provide the required information at the time that tenants signed leases.

In addition to these three citations, the EPA's New York office has issued 36 notices of non-compliance to businesses for failing to follow federal lead disclosure requirements.

Homeownership and Daycare Work Come Together

Over the past few years, University Neighborhood has expanded its work into the fields of homeownership and daycare. Recently, these two areas of our work have begun to come together. UNHP's work with homeowners and homebuyers progressed from workshops on purchase/renovation mortgages to the Homeownership Resource Fair this past year. One developing issue has been identifying a target audience to work with more intensely.

Meanwhile, the informal collection of

family daycare providers we helped organize beginning in 1998 has progressed to a formal network with its own program coordinator and trainings. Many of the over 80 daycare providers of Providers United/Provedoras Unidas either are interested purchasing a home or already own one.

As a first step, UNHP has begun to work with a daycare provider who owns a home and needs to build a small addition in order to accommodate more children in her growing business.

Due to this overlapping need, University Neighborhood has provided both technical assistance and a recoverable grant to cover the architectural fees.

In addition, a first-time homebuyer workshop was recently held with the daycare providers in order to gauge the level of interest and ability of the providers to buy a home. UNHP is currently conducting inquiries with lender partners about a low-interest mortgage product specifically tailored for family daycare providers.

Remembering Gale Cincotta

A hero for all community activists and organizers, Chicago native Gale Cincotta passed away this August. The founder of both the National People's Action (NPA) and the National Training Institute Center (NTIC), Cincotta continued her work until the end, including heading the NTIC Six City Experiment with Fannie Mae in which UNHP participates.

When told about Gale's death, one of the early community leaders of the Northwest Bronx Community and Clergy Coalition recollected seeing Gale in action in 1974 and saying, "Someday, we'll be doing that." Great people have that affect on people; hearing and seeing them inspire you to follow their lead. Gale made many of us better leaders, organizers and people.

Gale could cut to the chase and she could deflate an overblown official ego in a few words. She could translate complex issues into a clear analysis of what effect it would have on our neighborhoods. She recognized that we all had expertise and skills and opinions that could be valuable in efforts to improve



our communities and she showed us over and over again how to make sure our voices were being heard.

In her obituary notice, the *Chicago Sun-Times* quoted Gale at a 1982 demonstration, "They say we are not nice when

we protest and demonstrate at people's homes and offices, but bad housing isn't nice, redlining isn't nice, high oil prices aren't nice and crime on our streets isn't nice."

Neighborhoods First and *Reclaim America* -- both of these are phrases that are identified with Gale and they have taken on additional meaning in recent days. In the invitation to the celebration of Gale's life, it says, "To Gale, America is made up of neighborhoods and to fight for neighborhoods is the core of patriotism. She would want nothing less than for all of us to keep fighting for our neighborhoods."

A celebration of the life of Gale Cincotta was held on November 1, 2001 in Chicago.

Resources for Those Affected by September 11

On September 11, a number of us stared down the Grand Concourse to see the smoke rising over lower Manhattan. We moved into the office in time to see the collapse of the twin towers on television. It's still too early to assess the impact of this horrible attack.

The horror has brought a great outpouring of support from people throughout the City. The overflow of volunteers, the lines to donate blood and the prayer services are all indications of the determination and faith that will rebuild our City. That determination and faith will be tested repeatedly in the days ahead as the side effects of this attack become clearer due to budget and service cuts and a loss of jobs in New York. At UNHP, we will continue to pursue our mission of creating and preserving affordable housing while supporting the rebuilding efforts and adapting our work to address what will probably be a rapidly changing situation.

We are listing a few events and websites here that have information on donation opportunities as well as resources and other useful information for both individuals and nonprofit

organizations. A much larger list can be found on our website at www.unhp.org/donate.html.

- The September 11 Fund (United Way) is accepting donations and has released its Notice of Emergency Funding Availability at www.september11fund.org
- The Nonprofit Coordinating Committee has set up a web site for nonprofits to list services (office space, equipment, etc.) they can make available for their colleagues based downtown; stranded groups can also list their own needs at <http://www.npccny.org/disaster.htm>
- Neighborhood Housing Services of the South Bronx is holding a housing workshop on Thursday, November 8 for those affected by the attack. Those who have lost jobs or family members may be eligible for some type of housing assistance. The workshop will be held at Mid-Bronx Senior Citizens Council, 900 Grand Concourse (at 161St.) from 6 - 8 pm. Representatives from FEMA, HUD and the Bronx Borough President's Office will be at the workshop. For more information, contact Juan Santana at (718) 992-5979.