



Notes

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Northwest Bronx Homeowners' Fair this Wednesday

This coming Wednesday, October 12, from 4:30 to 7:00 PM, University Neighborhood Housing Program (UNHP) will be hosting the Northwest Bronx Homeowners' Resource Fair. Held at the Concourse House Chapel (E. 196th St & the Grand Concourse), the fair will be an opportunity for homeowners to learn about programs that are offered to them through different organizations and the City.

There are in fact numerous programs available to homeowners, but it can be a daunting task to

find what is out there and understand which program best suits each individual situation. The fair will conveniently bring together many groups who will be able to answer homeowners' questions about programs that include foreclosure prevention, heating assistance, home weatherization and repair, mortgage/financial counseling, and additional senior focused assistance.

According to census data, homeowners in a large section of the Northwest Bronx have a poverty rate double the citywide average.

This, coupled with an increasing trend of predatory lenders targeting poor and minority neighborhoods, has led UNHP to increase our work with homeowners in the Northwest Bronx. This resource fair is just one of the initiatives we are taking to assist homeowners.

We hope that this fair will be an opportunity for many to take advantage of the various programs aimed at their needs. For further information, contact Eric Fergen at 718-933-3101, or stop by the fair between 4:30 and 7:00 PM on Wednesday the 12th.

Hurricane Relief and Affordable Housing

Hurricane Relief

There are many worthy charities working to provide relief in the Gulf area. One with which we at UNHP are familiar is the Southern Mutual Self Help Association. Director Lorna Bourg and the folks at Southern Mutual have been fighting to improve their communities in rural Louisiana since the 1960s.

The impact of the hurricanes on their communities has not gotten much play in the NY media. As a result, few people have heard about the devastation that has affected their lives and jobs through Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. Their recovery efforts and their request for assistance can be viewed on their web site at southernmutualhelp.org/RuralRecoveryFund.cfm. This

page offers a detailed report on what is going on in that community. Please consider supporting their work.

Hurricane Relief Scams

There have been some publicized attempts at ripping off good-hearted people with fraudulent fundraising attempts. The scam that has not gotten much attention is the proposal by members of the Republican Study Committee in the House of Representatives to offset support for hurricane relief by cutting programs for low-income Americans.

The National Low Income Housing Coalition reports that the proposals call for cuts to Medicaid and food stamps and the elimination of the Neighborhood Reinvestment Corporation, the Community Development Financial Institutions Fund

and funding for Legal Service Corporations.

Under the guise of paying for Hurricane Relief, a variety of failed and contentious proposals are being resurrected. Obviously, the question of how to pay for the relief efforts and the many ongoing efforts of the federal government is valid. It merits more forthright discussion and debate and it requires participation by all. The Center for Budget and Policy Priorities at www.cbpp.org and the National Low Income Housing Coalition at www.nlihc.org provide useful information and analyses on these topics.

Notes is a publication of University Neighborhood Housing Program: working to create, preserve and finance affordable housing in the Northwest Bronx.

available online at www.unhp.org

Vote Needed on GSE Legislation in Congress

Following accounting scandals at both Freddie Mac and Fannie Mae, new legislation has been moving through Congress that would create a new regulatory agency to oversee these Government Sponsored Enterprises (GSEs). Part of this legislation, known as the *Federal Housing Finance Reform Act*, is a provision to create an Affordable Housing Fund based on a small percentage of the companies' after-tax profits.

Despite opposition from the conservative Republican Study Committee (RSC), the bill (H.R. 1461) and the Affordable Housing Fund amendment both passed through the House committee with large majorities. Ranking Republicans, however, have not allowed a full vote on the House floor to take place; Ranking House Financial Services Committee member Barney Frank (D-MA) has accused Republican leadership of taking the bill hostage.

According to the National Low

Income Housing Coalition, the consensus is that the bill, including the Affordable Housing Fund provision, would pass the entire House with a large majority of votes. Rep. Frank believes that some of the most conservative members of Congress "are engaging in this type of ambush" because they know they do not have the votes to defeat it.

An attempt to bring the bill to the House floor for a vote last month proved unsuccessful. Now a number of ranking Republicans from Ohio and Louisiana have circulated a letter clarifying some misleading information released by the RSC that opposed the fund.

They also sent a letter to then-Majority Leader Tom DeLay (R-TX) to bring H.R. 1461 to the floor for a vote, stating that "the affordable housing fund will help significantly improve access to housing in areas with special needs – particularly those areas impacted by Katrina." Indeed, part of their proposed revisions to the Affordable Housing

Fund would be to prioritize those areas affected by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita for the next five years.

A September 27 editorial in *The New York Times*, "Stop Stalling on Affordable Housing," calls for a policy shift in Congress on housing issues, beginning with the passage of the *Federal Housing Finance Reform Act*. The editorial likens this act to the *Community Reinvestment Act* that has made available \$1.5 trillion to low-income communities since 1977. In the wake of the recent hurricanes and with the need for affordable housing growing overall, the *Times* has called on the House to "end its bickering and pass this bill."

Affordable housing advocates agree that it is time for this bill to come to a vote on the House floor with the Affordable Housing Fund intact. A similar bill on GSE legislation is also pending in the Senate, but it lacks any affordable housing provisions while its restrictions on the GSEs are even tighter.

Building Indicator Workshop Wednesday November 2nd

UNHP's work on multifamily pricing and building conditions through our research reports and the proposed Multifamily Assistance Center has led to the creation of our Building Indicator Project (BIP) database. We have been able to research mortgage, deed, violation and City lien information and develop all of this data into a scoring system. This in turn has allowed us to present major multifamily lenders in the Bronx with their portfolios and show them which properties appear (on paper) to be in physical and/or financial distress.

The BIP database has proven to be an invaluable tool in identifying buildings in our neighborhoods to lenders, community organizing groups, the City, and elected officials. Word has gotten out about the usefulness of this tool, and other neighborhood and citywide organizations have approached us to learn about our model and replicate it in their own neighborhoods.

In answering this call to expand our model of problem building research, UNHP will run a hands-on workshop on locating, organiz-

ing and processing this data on Wednesday, November 2nd. The discussion will include strategizing based on community groups' needs and interests, as well as resources.

While details are still being finalized, the workshop will be held at the Heiskell Enterprise Center for Technology in the Fordham Bedford Section of the Bronx. The registration fee is \$45 and space is limited. If you are interested, please contact Greg Jost at gjost@unhp.org or 718-933-3101.