

Staggering waiting lists found for affordable senior housing

Minimum of 19,700 Seniors Waiting for Affordable Housing in Community Districts 7 & 9

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Introduction

This white paper discusses the heightened need for affordable housing on the Upper West Side of New York City. In early 2016, LiveOn NY published a study that found an estimated 200,000 seniors on waiting lists for affordable housing throughout New York City. This paper seeks to revisit and expand upon the 2016 study, focusing on a specific segment of the city as a case study: Community Districts 7 and 9 in the Upper West Side of Manhattan.



Background

In January of 2016 LiveOn NY released a survey of affordable senior housing buildings located in New York City, financed through Section 202 of the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). An astounding 110,912 seniors were found to be on waiting lists for affordable housing through the HUD202 Program. With a citywide response rate of 46%, LiveOn NY estimated that upwards of 200,000 individuals were likely to be on waiting lists in New York City.

Further, the study found that seniors wait an average of 7 years after first applying to receive affordable housing, with some waiting as many as 10 years. Applicants must be at least 62 years old to be eligible to receive senior housing or be added to a waitlist; this means that many low-income seniors must wait until they are at least 69 years old to receive a unit, assuming the individual joined a waiting list at the earliest possible time of eligibility.

Updates

Since the 2016 waiting list study release, numerous policy changes have taken effect that are worth noting—one of the most relevant being Mayor Bill de Blasio’s commitment to constructing or preserving 15,000 units of affordable senior housing as a component to his overall housing plan, and the passage of Zoning for Quality and Affordability (ZQA). This commitment demonstrates a growing consensus and response to the need for additional affordable senior housing in New York City.

The New York City Council has shown its interest in combatting New York City’s affordability crisis through the enactment of numerous tenant provisions to ensure that individuals who have existing

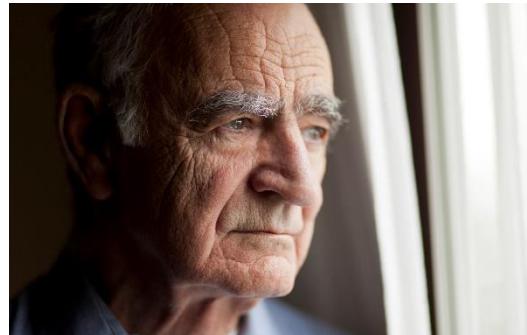
housing remain their homes. For example, Council Member Mark Levine, representing Council District 7, and Council Member Vanessa Gibson, representing Council District 16 in the Bronx, co-sponsored a bill to ensure low-income tenants receive a lawyer when facing eviction. This historic effort shows the multi-faceted governmental response to the affordability crisis coming from representatives of this district and throughout NYC.

On the state level, Governor Cuomo and the legislature have also affirmed the dire need for affordable housing through the appropriation of significant capital resources to produce and preserve New York's affordable housing stock. In particular, the State appropriated \$125 million in FY 2017-2018 to create a new senior affordable housing capital funding stream.

New York City's already alarming homeless count has continued to rise since 2016. Currently at crisis level, New York City reports an estimated 60,856 individuals being homeless in July of 2017¹. This is the highest level of homelessness since the Great Depression in the 1930's and affects New Yorkers of all ages.

New Findings

More than one and a half years after the 2016 study, the need for affordable senior housing continues to be significant. This updated study found there to be 19,700 seniors currently on waiting lists in Community Districts 7 and 9. At an overall response rate of 44% it is estimated that an astounding 44,028 seniors are on waiting lists for affordable housing through the HUD202 program.



One of the responding buildings recorded an open waiting list of 10,000 seniors, skewing the results higher than all other findings. This number is significantly higher than the other respondents, likely due to the fact that most applications remain closed in other buildings. Of the 7 buildings that responded, only 3 currently allow seniors to join their waiting list.

The findings show that the average estimated time spent on affordable housing waiting lists is currently 10.6 years. Again, this means that a senior able to find an open waiting list at the time of first eligibility, 62 years old, will on average wait until he or she is 72.6 to receive an affordable home. More specifically, of the buildings that responded, only a total of 45 units on average turnover each year. With at least 19,700 seniors waiting for one of these units, the odds of receiving affordable senior housing in Community Districts 7 and 9 become increasingly bleak.

Although this study represents merely a snapshot of two Community Districts within New York City, there is reason to believe that the substantial need for housing is a constant citywide. This ability to

¹ coalitionforthehomeless.org/basic-facts-about-homelessness-new-york-city/

generalize is due to the significant demographic changes currently taking place among low-income seniors in the city. Like most of America, New York City is aging rapidly and in masse. Looking forward, the city's senior population is expected to grow by 47% by 2030². A growing percentage of New Yorkers prefer to age in their community, surrounded by the social networks and supports cultivated over a lifetime rather than making the often costly move to a nursing home. These factors of demographic growth and changing housing preferences will combine to ensure that demand for affordable senior housing continues to grow dramatically citywide.

Conclusion

While HUD202s represent just one form of affordable housing in NYC, the staggering waitlists highlight the incredible need for continued investment in housing for New York City's senior population. Without significant investment in both the preservation and production of affordable senior housing, this trend of seniors languishing on waitlists is unlikely to be reversed. It is imperative that community residents come together to support affordable housing in their neighborhoods so that housing production can begin to combat this incredible deficit of affordable housing availability. Beyond the incentive of aiding local seniors in obtaining affordable housing by supporting both production and preservation, new development increasingly includes community space that can be of benefit to the entire neighborhood.

For seniors often living on fixed incomes, obtaining an affordable housing unit can mean the difference between affording vital medications and nutritious meals, or going without. It is imperative that affordable senior housing be prioritized as a worthwhile investment by both governmental institutions and the community at-large.



² static1.squarespace.com/static/562a3197e4b0493d4ffd3105/t/56e7095d9f726687df953d47/1457981794370/CSGS-Housing-Policy-Paper2014.pdf