

Best Places to live in NY

JASON SHEFTELL



COOK & FOX ARCHITECTS

An eco-efficient studio at the Hegeman in Brownsville by Common Ground

GREAT EIGHTS

The best apartments in the city's affordable housing program



SUSAN WATTS/DAILY NEWS

The roof at Castle Gardens on 140th St. overlooks the Hudson River.



A \$43 million renovation has begun at West Farms Square in the Bronx.

JEFF BACHNER



A new playground at West Farms

\$434 with average income of around \$15,081.27. Vouchers for Section 8, though, are disappearing as the federal government cuts program funds.

Individuals normally receive Section 8 vouchers from NYC Housing Authority. The waiting list, however, is 124,000 people long with over 40% of current voucher-holders disabled.

Developers of low-income housing receive vouchers on a per project basis. They use Section 8 as one of several ways to subsidize construction and maintenance costs. The federal government pays the additional rent on top of the tenant's payment to bring the total to fair market value for that area or neighborhood.

There are 93,000 Section 8 units available in the city. The latest presidential budget requested a \$640 million cut (out of \$9.34 billion) to the 35-year-old program nationally.

"We live in an era of constrained public resources," says Shola Olatoye, vice president and market leader for Enterprise Community Partners, a

New York is one of the leading cities in the country for attempting to provide citizens with quality housing. Certain developers have gotten so good at it, some of the homes are in state-of-the-art buildings with amenities like computer lounges, 24-hour security and roof gardens with river views.

Tenants living under the Section 8 federal subsidy program pay one-third of their income as rent. In the five boroughs, the average rent paid in the program for NYC Department of Housing Preservation vouchers is

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nonprofit partner with top local builders of affordable housing. "This is one of the most important and successful housing programs of all time. Quality housing changes people's lives and is at the foundation of neighborhood growth. New York City leads the entire af-

fordable industry in thinking about how to do this right. That goes for social service programs and housing design."

Olatoye's got that right. Some of these homes would command top prices in their neighborhoods. Others have won national architectural awards. Here are five locations citywide where Section 8 recipients have great homes.

WEST FARMS SQ.

1 West Farms Square Plaza, Bronx
Fordham Bedford Housing Corp./University Neighborhood Housing Program

Yvonne Adorno (inset) has lots to celebrate in her four-bedroom home.



JEFF BACHNER

SECTION 8 PRICE: \$257
MARKET PRICE: \$1,900

TWO BLOCKS from the Bronx Zoo, West Farms is an eight-building renovation recently purchased by respected Bronx-based affordable housing developer Fordham Bedford and University Neighborhood Housing Program.

"This is the largest project we've undertaken," says Fordham Bedford executive director John Reilly, who joined the affordable development organization 32 years ago. "To impact something this large can help the community inside and outside the complex."

Inside the 526-unit project, lobbies have been updated, landscaping redone, play-

grounds repaired and new elevators, security measures and central-heating system added. Residents feel a new sense of community.

Yvonne Adorno moved to the complex in 1976. She rents a four-bedroom apartment on the eighth floor for 30 percent of her income. Painted brown with black-leather couches and wooden cabinets, the dwelling is home to Adorno's daughter and grandchildren, too.

"Just because your poor doesn't mean you have to live in a mess," she says. "I treasure my home. When you have something nice, you should take care of it."

THE HEGEMAN

39 Hegeman Ave., Brownsville
Common Ground

COOK + FOX ARCHITECTS



ON A mission to end homelessness in New York City, Common Ground has learned to turn tiny spaces into efficient living machines.

Designed by Cook + Fox Architects, the Hegeman is so technologically advanced and eco-friendly that all residual energy (lights and televisions but not alarm clocks) turn off in a resident's home when they swipe their identification cards to exit the building. Interiors are constructed with durable,

non-toxic materials.

While all 161 homes are studios, the rooms are designed to maximize space for the single user. (One-hundred homes are reserved for formerly homeless; 61 homes for low-income adults.) They have mini-galley kitchens, desks, window benches, wooden furniture and large windows for lights. The building has a green roof, solar panels, computer room and inner courtyard.

"It's more than a physical

YOU SHOULD KNOW

WHAT: The top Section 8 apartments in the city. Design and eco-friendly building are key points to enhancing affordable housing.

WHY: The federal government has threatened to cut funding to the program, which currently includes 93,000 units.

HOW: Consistently checking New York City Department of Housing Preservation website, nyc.gov/hpd, can help people find quality housing.

CASTLE GARDENS

625 W. 140th St., West Harlem
Fortune Society/Jonathan Rose & Companies



FYH SUSAN WATTS/DAILY NEWS

SECTION 8 PRICE: \$364
MARKET PRICE: \$2,200

OVERLOOKING THE Hudson River across the street from a state park, Castle Gardens is a new-construction apartment building featuring a roof garden with river views and small planters where residents grow flowers and vegetables. Developed and run by the Fortune Society, specialists in helping the formerly incarcerated re-enter society, the property has a library, lectures by local celebrities such as chef Marcus Samuelsson and 24-hour security. The 114 units are split between 50 studios for homeless with incarcerated pasts, 14 one- or two-bedrooms for families where at least one individual has been in prison, and 50 apartments for low-income families.

Geraldo Arzuga lives here with his wife, Genevieve, teenage daughter and 2-year-old son. The two-bedroom has an open kitchen, hardwood floors and large master bedroom. The foyer can fit a large dining room table.

"We came from the shelter system," says Bronx-born Arzuga, who did prison time for small-time drug peddling as a young man. "This changed our lives. When you've been in a shelter, you realize how important a home is. When I first saw it, I couldn't believe how nice it was. The wood floors are beautiful things. I am so grateful for this house and to be able to live here."

Geraldo Arzuga in the kitchen with wife Genevieve in their Castle Gardens two-bedroom apartment. Right, the exterior of the building with 24-hour security and roof garden.



Designed by New York architects Cook + Fox, the Hegeman is one of the most technologically advanced buildings in the city.



Kitchen in Victor Lopez's studio apartment

CHELSEA COURT

105 W. 17th St., Manhattan
Palladia

SECTION 8 PRICE: \$280
MARKET PRICE: \$2,095

SECTION 8 PRICE: \$215
MARKET PRICE: \$900

IN THE HEART of Chelsea off Sixth Ave., Chelsea Court is one of the best-located affordable projects in the world. In a state of disrepair, the building was purchased for \$1 from the city in 1994 by Palladia, which helps people stay off streets and out of jail. Now, it's filled with 18 studios.

Architect Louise Braverman designed a skylight over a lobby lounge so natural light flows daily into common spaces. Artwork lines the entrance hallway. An outdoor terrace on the building's second floor provides another amenity. Natural materials, pocket doors and industrial accents negate any institutional feel from the housing project.

Braverman earned a 2003 Merit in Design award from the New York State Chapter of the American Insti-

tute of Architects, and the building was featured in a 2004 exhibit on innovative design in affordable housing at the Smithsonian National Building Museum.

Victor Lopez pays \$218 for a studio. The second floor patio is outside his door. He found Chelsea Court through the Doe Fund, a group that educates and finds

homes for people living on the streets or in need of training.

"I like coming home and seeing the artwork," says Lopez, originally from Williamsburg. "I know how nice this neighborhood is. I thank God for how lucky I am."



A kids room in a Park Hill two-bed apartment

SECTION 8 PRICE: \$273
MARKET PRICE: \$1,300

JEFF BACHNER

VIEW OF New York Harbor, a \$12 million renovation, and a brand new Barack Obama Computer Center – that can help turn around a housing complex. Set on a hill overlooking the affluent Staten Island neighborhood of Grymes Hill, the multi-building complex is the largest affordable housing project in the borough, counting more than 1,000 apartments.

New York Congressman Michael Grimm attended the renovation celebration. After beginning in 2005, the work at the complex was delayed because of financial issues. Now complete, it includes new kitchens, new boilers, elevator upgrades, intercom systems, brick repointing, storm drains, new lighting, new smoke detectors in each home, redesign and renovation of all lobbies, and increasing energy efficiency in common spaces and units.

PARK HILL

240 Park Hill Ave., Staten Island
Unithree Investment Corp.



Jaden Watson gets logged on.

"This is an example of how quality housing can improve the lives of tenants and make a once-troubled housing complex a safe and comfortable place," says Rishi Pande, an investment banker turned Unithree manager. "There is a pride that you didn't feel before."

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