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\$1.00

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NEW YORK'S HOMETOWN NEWSPAPER

Sunday, December 8, 2002

Keep the housing coming

By THE REV. JOHNNY RAY YOUNGBLOOD
and SISTER MARYELLEN KANE

Mayor Bloomberg is scheduled to deliver a major speech on Tuesday on a number of important matters, including housing. We are eager to hear what he will say. But we also are concerned because in a time of budget cuts, conventional wisdom might insist that little or nothing should be done for housing.

Had groups like East Brooklyn Congregations and South Bronx Churches bought this line in the '70s and early '80s, thousands of new homeowners wouldn't be reviving streets in Brooklyn and the South Bronx today. If the Community Preservation Corp. had waited back then, thousands of renovated apartments all around the city would still be vacant.

So what can the mayor do?

■ Preserve and protect the greatest single source of affordable housing in the city — the 170,000 apartments of the Housing Authority. The mayor should bring to the authority the same intensity and focus he has brought to the schools: Recruit top-flight managers, initiate an NYPD-like Compstat system, protect children and seniors from the plague of respiratory illnesses caused by rodent and pest infestations, make the authority a national model of housing management and maintenance.

■ Investigate the mismanagement of as many as 40,000 apartments by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and pry them away from the feds. HUD developments like Brooklyn's Noble Drew Ali and Fulton Park Plaza are notorious for crime, drugs and high vacancy rates. HUD has proven that it cannot man-

age these developments. It should transfer them to the city, along with the funds to upgrade and maintain them.

■ Continue to support the creation of minimally subsidized, affordable housing that lets the best and brightest of our working families — cops, firefighters, nurses, bank employees, factory workers, teachers — stay in New York City.

In addition to continuing to build Nehemiah homes (thanks to Bloomberg's strong support, we're going into Brooklyn's Spring Creek area in 2004), our affiliate orga-

nizations have worked with the Community Preservation Corp. to design four-story, eight-unit apartment houses with one-bedroom apartments renting for about \$650 a month and two-bedroom units for about \$800. To make this work, the city needs to provide free land and a per-unit subsidy of \$35,000 to reduce costs to tenants.

How can the mayor do that during a budget crisis? If our idea moved at a breakneck pace, we could begin building the first 200 units one year from today. The first subsidy, not a huge sum by any measure, wouldn't be needed until 18 months from now.

The city must not forget to play offense as it mounts its aggressive defense against budget threats. Families come here from all over the globe not to participate in an Olympics extravaganza, but to earn gold medals in the really im-

portant events — family formation, neighborhood restoration, city and community renewal. They need the mayor to support their efforts to make this city great.

Youngblood and Kane are leaders of the Metro Industrial Areas Foundation.

*Even in a
budget
crisis, the
mayor
can
expand
the stock*