

Home sweet home: New Affordable Housing Coming to East New York

By Matt Zeidel

The slogan of one of East New York's most popular churches is catchy: "Resurrection is a lifestyle. Live it!" Now, with the help of the church and others like it, city officials and private developers, East New York itself is getting a chance to turn the catch phrase into a reality.

At an Aug. 3 ceremony at the house of worship in question, the St. Paul Community Baptist Church, 859 Hendrix Street, the assembled leaders of industry, church and politics announced the breaking ground of a historic affordable-housing project, the Nehemiah Spring Creek Houses at Gateway Estates.

The 227-acre site, will contain nearly 2,200 homes, including 125 units of senior citizen housing.

The project is so ambitious because, it's not just about affordable home ownership; an entire village is being built



A computer rendition of a one-family home in Nehemiah Spring Creek Houses. Many homes will be one-family, fewer two- and three-family units. One-family homes will start at \$168,000.

here, complete with parks, emergency services, a public school and shopping — all on land that has never before been developed, an almost nonexistent resource in Brooklyn and New York City.

But housing is the first thing that will be built, and it's affordable by nearly anyone's standard.

The price of a single-family home will begin at \$158,300, with a \$46,000 grant per home from the City. The City will also front a total of \$30 million for infrastructure costs like roads and sewers.

Meanwhile, new luxury homes on Pine Street across from the infamously dangerous Louis H. Pink Houses, still just vacant lots and sets of blueprints, recently sold for \$625,000, according to a published report.

So the demand for housing in East New York is clearly thriving, and work is beginning to meet it, said Neil Coleman, of the Department of Housing Preservation and Development.

Phase I of the construction, whose groundbreaking was announced at St. Paul Community, will see the construction of a 184 units of affordable living space in 117 buildings: 69 single-family houses, 29 two-family dwellings and 19 three-family homes.

"We've done a lot," said Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg, at the groundbreaking ceremony — although, thanks to the continued heat wave, no ground was actually broken —

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Nearly 2,200 New Homes to Be Constructed On East New York Site

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"but there's still more to do. It's time to get to work building."
Bloomberg told the assembled fan-clutching churchgoers and dignitaries that the Nehemiah homes are another step in his administration's New Housing Marketplace Plan, which aims to provide 165,000 affordable homes for 500,000 people.

"We are harnessing Brooklyn's economic success to...provide the capital needed to develop essential infrastructure and build a new neighborhood that will be affordable to working New Yorkers," the mayor said. Financing for the construction is being provided in part by a loan through the Community Preservation Corporation, but that isn't covering everything.

Enter the church. St. Paul Community Baptist Church and the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod have provided for at least \$2 million in interest-free construction loans. And Nehemiah HDFC, which will share in developing the site, is connected with East Brooklyn Congregations.

Add in the private developer, The Related Companies, and the full-team effort to get this place built is clear.
"This is an example of how [partnerships] work, how all that pays off," said Rev. Carlos Hernandez, director of districts and congregations director of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. "And it shows that faith and tenacity pay off."

The concept of Nehemiah homes — named after the biblical rebuilder of Jerusalem — has been used in cities across the country. In East New York, the 1990s saw around 2,000-plus units of Nehemiah housing, which sold at the time for around \$80,000.

And the "village" concept, with its multifold uses, is a new twist on the Nehemiah concept, one that is part of a new way to look at community building.

The Nehemiah Spring Creek Houses will be income-diverse, meaning it won't only cater to the very poorest New Yorkers. "We'll have many income levels, so as not to be concentrating poverty or concentrating wealth in any one neighborhood, but to have a mix, HPD's Coleman said.

"This is what we mean when we talk about smart development: mixed-use, income-diverse communities with street-level commerce. This is not a case of if you build it, they will come." Borough President Marty Markowitz said.

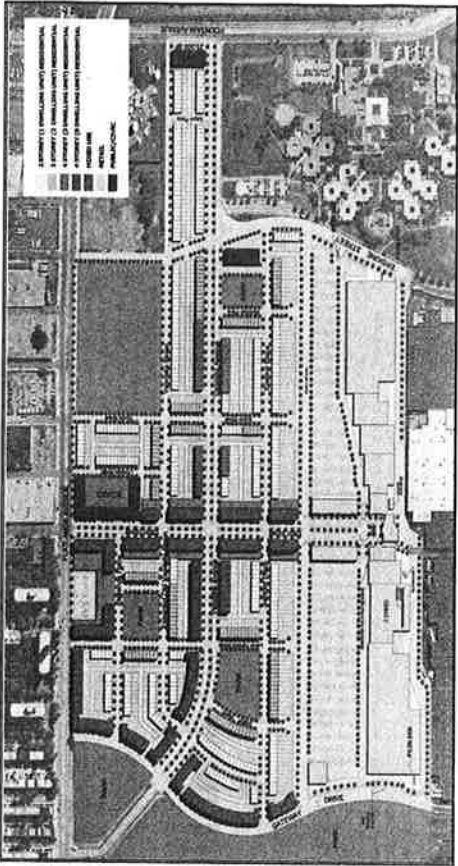
"This is based on the belief that if you build it, they will stay" — and that's what we want Brooklynites to do: to stay, participate in and benefit from the Brooklyn Renaissance today and in the days ahead."

And what a Renaissance it is. The Rev. Johnny Ray Youngblood, the charismatic senior pastor of St. Paul Community, likened yesterday's East New York to something out of Mad Max.

"Twenty years ago, I likened East Brooklyn to a graveyard," he said, describing the burn-out buildings, crime and desolation residents felt. But everyone's convinced that East New York only remains in the history books.

"If our community is a grave yard," Youngblood said, "isn't the best place for a resurrection cemetery?"

The Nehemiah Spring Creek Houses at Gateway Estates will be filled by lottery at the earliest next year, when the first phase of construction is near completion. For more information on registering for the lottery, or about other affordable housing opportunities throughout New York, can visit <http://www.nyc.gov/html/nypd/html/apa/rtm/html/other/rtst.html>, or call 311 and ask for the Affordable Housing Hotline.



A view from above of the Nehemiah Spring Creek Houses at Gateway Estates. The complex will include 2,200 units of affordable housing, shopping, a school and its own emergency services, and starts directly to the west of the Gateway Center at Erskine Street.