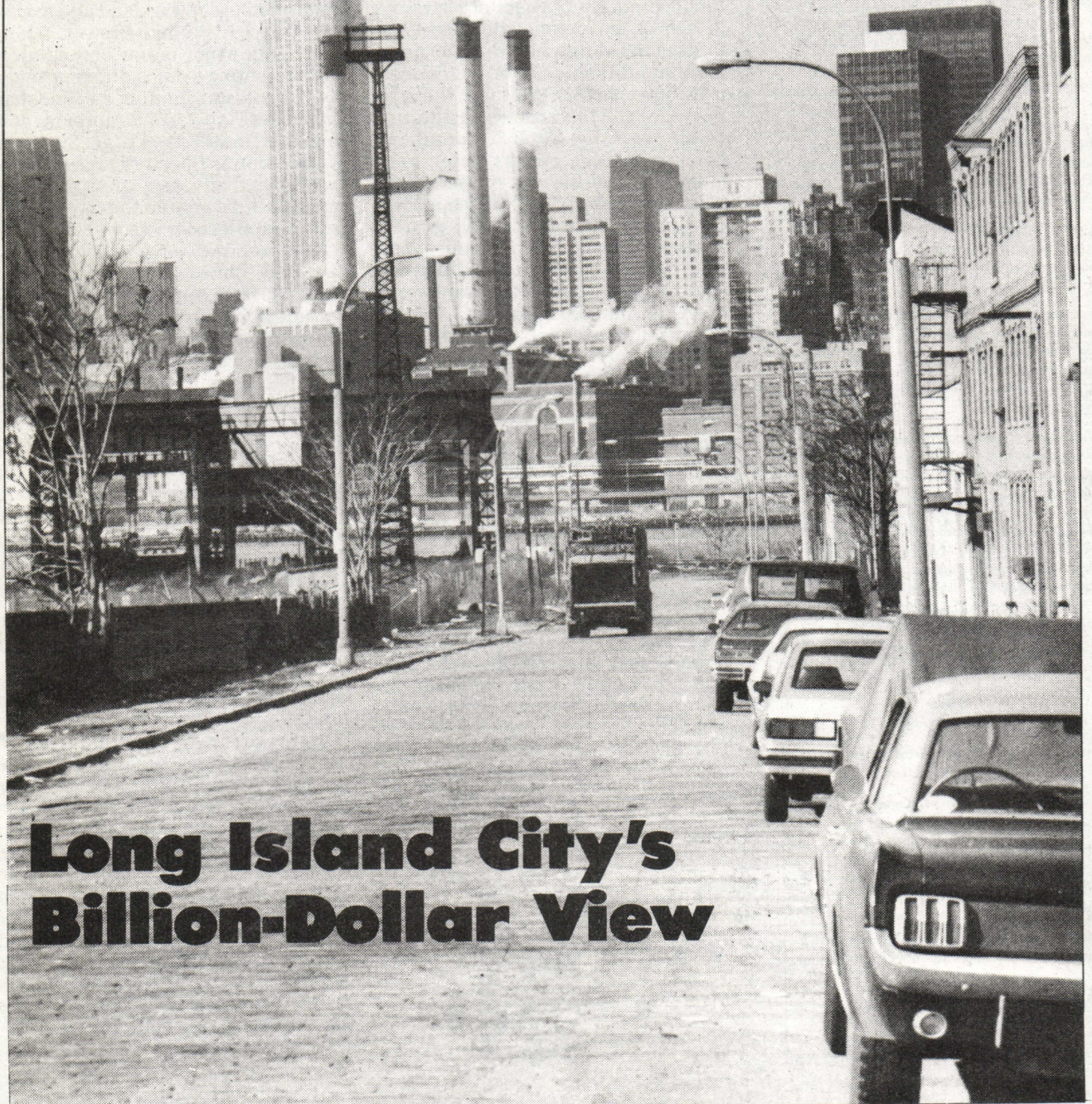


**SUNNYSIDE'S  
DEMOCRATIC  
VISION**

**THE GAP IN  
NEW YORK'S  
INFANT CARE**

**HOUSING  
PROPOSALS FROM  
KOCH & CUOMO**

# CITY LIMITS



**Long Island City's  
Billion-Dollar View**



# CITY LIMITS

Volume X Number 3

*City Limits* is published ten times per year, monthly except double issues in June/July and August/September, by the City Limits Community Information Service, Inc., a nonprofit organization devoted to disseminating information concerning neighborhood revitalization. The publication is sponsored by three organizations. The sponsors are:

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*Pratt Institute Center for Community and Environmental Development*, a technical assistance and advocacy office offering professional planning and architectural services to low and moderate income community groups. The Center also analyzes and monitors government policy and performance.

*Urban Homesteading Assistance Board*, a technical assistance organization providing assistance to low income tenant cooperatives in management and sweat equity rehabilitation.

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## A Paper for Small Landlords

SMALL PROPERTY OWNERS HAVE a new voice in the *Property Owners Press* an eight-page paper that made its debut in November, 1984. Editor Stephanie Caruana is a member of the Small Property Owners of New York (SPONY), an organization for landlords of buildings with up to 50 units. Although there is no formal connection between SPONY and the new paper, all of the articles in the first issue were by SPONY members, espousing that group's line—anti-tenant and pro-private property. The cover contained a SPONY statement of purpose which listed the group's goals—removal of pro-tenant judges from housing court, landlord lobbying against Flynn-Dearie and renewal of the Omnibus Housing Act, and the defeat of pro-tenant legislators like Assemblyman Pete Grannis. Inside, SPONY vice president Richard Boodman has some interesting ideas in a column titled "What's Your Opinion?" including a boycott of the *Village Voice* until they publish a Ten Worst Tenants article; taking rent controlled apartments from tenants who litter; and previews of articles for the next issue including "Tenant Organizers: Who They Are, What They Are About, How They Can Be Neutralized."

Although the *Property Owners Press* has yet to make it past the first issue, Caruana has high hopes for publishing 15,000 copies sometime in March. Despite the vehemently anti-tenant rhetoric of her paper, she insists that small property owners have a lot in common with them and would "love to connect with tenant groups." With friends like that who needs Mayor Koch? □A.F.

## Unprintable

EVEN IN THE WAKE OF THE NEW York Times' late December expose of the city's mismanaged Section 8 housing fund program, community groups had a hard time getting their side of the story heard (See "The Housing Fund Story the Times Didn't Tell," February, 1985). A letter from Association for Neighborhood and Housing Development chair Galen Kirkland and Executive Director Bonnie Brower, taking issue with major points of the article and presenting a much different analysis of events surrounding the fund than that of the *Times* article, never made it onto the *Times*' letters page. Since the Association is the city's largest membership and advocacy group, with 36 organizations around the city belonging, it would seem like a good candidate to respond to the article.

The *Times* did print a good response from Julie Sandorff, director of Mid-Bronx Desperadoes. And it also found room for a reply from former state housing commissioner and now development attorney Victor Marrero who challenged the *Times*' questions about how his client South Bronx poverty czar Ramon Velez, spent his share of the funds. But then, just as hapless Deputy Housing Commissioner Charles Reiss told the *Times* in its article that Marrero "gets his calls answered" downtown, so does Marrero get his letters published on West 43rd Street.

## Housing Fix-ups Analyzed

There has been almost no adequate explanation of an important tenant protection bill pending in Albany that would end landlord "double-dipping" when they make renovations and file for rent increases and tax abatements outside of the tenant press. But North Bronx residents have been benefitting from an excellent series of articles on that topic by *Riverdale Press* reporter Miriam Bensman. While most weeklies steer regular readers away from complicated sounding real estate issues, Bensman's articles have explained what owners are up to and what is at stake. A series last year by her on wrap-around mortgages was similarly valuable. □T.R.



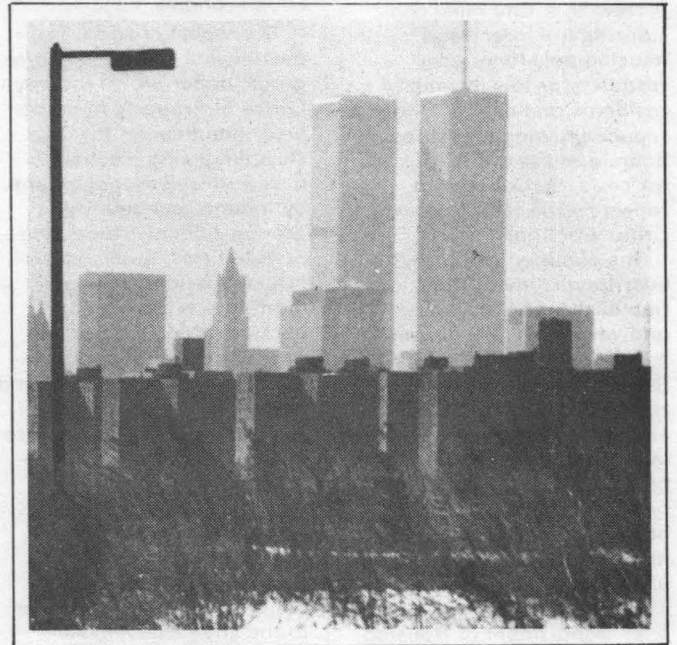
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 The Port Authority's plans call for dramatic changes in this riverside hamlet on the East River.
- Sunnyside's Democratic Vision** 16  
 Sixty years after this model garden city was built, neighbors are trying to make an experiment in community sharing work.

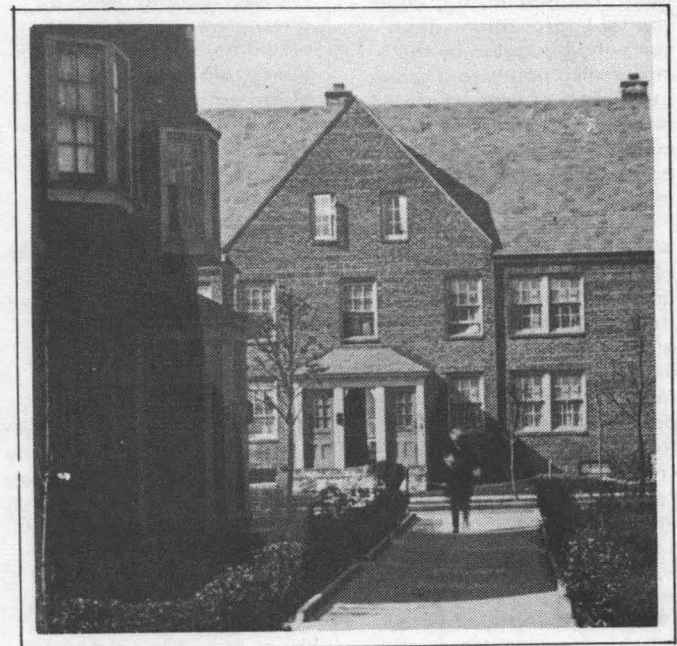
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## SHORT TERM NOTES

## IN REM STUDY

New York City must consider its tax foreclosed housing as a long-term resource for low income residents and as a way to reduce growing pressures of homelessness and high shelter costs, according to a report by the New York Urban Coalition.

The coalition conducted a year-long study of the condition of the city's occupied and vacant 150,000 *in rem* apartments which came into the city's hands after private owners abandoned them. The study said the city's goal—to regard the housing as only temporarily in its hands before once again becoming privately-owned taxpaying properties—"has proven evasive."

While applauding the city's Department of Housing Preservation and Development for rising to the task of managing and stabilizing many of the buildings, the study found that most apartments needed much greater capital improvements than currently budgeted by the city. It also points to a growing logjam of property transfers because many tenants cannot afford rents to support private taxpaying ownership.

The Urban Coalition report was written by Harry DeRienzo of the Consumer Farmer Foundation and Joan B. Allen of the National Consumer Cooperative Bank. Urban Coalition Senior Vice-President Richard M. Cherry said that the purpose of the report was to focus discussion on the city's critical low income housing needs and examine the role of *in rem* housing.

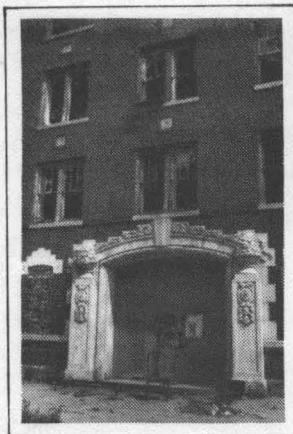
The study examined the crisis of housing affordability which preceded the city's 1976 decision to speed property tax foreclosures. It also looked at current employment and income trends in the city affecting the tenants of city-owned property who, the re-

port found, have failed to benefit from upturns in the city's economy.

The report provides an overview of the various programs under which the city's Office of Property Management handles the tax foreclosed housing, such as decentralized management by tenants, community groups, administrators and private firms. Both community and tenant management face a growing backlog, it found, due to lack of funding for rehabilitation. Apartments managed directly by the city have even poorer tenants and are unlikely to generate sufficient rent rolls to meet expenses, the report states.

To meet those problems, the report calls for establishment of a new public benefit corporation, similar to the city's Housing Authority, to take over long-term management of the properties. Upgrading of standards for apartment improvements, as well as increased funding levels for alternative management would both speed buildings being sold as well as safeguard emerging low income nonprofit cooperatives from eventual building crises. It also recommends that the city return to its original vesting schedule which would seize buildings at the point of actual owner abandonment rather than several years after the fact when building deterioration has increased. The city should develop legal mechanisms to allow owners to donate distressed properties to the city or tenant associations in exchange for cancellation of tax arrearages and repair debts.

Copies of the report are available from: Gregory Cohen, New York Urban Coalition, Inc., 99 Hudson Street, New York, NY 10013. (212) 219-1330. □T.R.



Carolyn Wells

One of the city's many *in rem* buildings.

## JAIL FOR THE LANDLORDS

For only the second and third times in the recent history of Brooklyn Housing Court, a judge has used his powers to send landlords to jail.

Judge Gerald Bank did so twice: once in late January and again in early February, handing out 30-day jail sentences to a Borough Park owner who had threatened his tenants and a Crown Heights landlord who had sabotaged his building's heating system.

Bank's moves tripled the number of jail sentences meted out in Kings County in cases where owners have refused to provide heat and hot water. The last time a Brooklyn owner was sent to jail was in 1982 by Judge Arthur S. Aaron. According to figures released to *City Limits* by the litigation unit of the city's housing department, since 1981, 35 jailings have been ordered by judges citywide to punish contempt cases.

Bronx judges have ordered the most owners jailed with 17 sentences; next is Manhattan with 11, followed by Queens with four and Brooklyn with three. Not all of these cases resulted in actual jail terms, however,

since some landlords flee, and others manage to successfully have the orders reversed.

Getting one of the Brooklyn owners in that borough's most recent cases actually behind bars has been an example of how difficult it can be.

Owner H. Zvi Shenberger got his sentence for refusing to provide heat for 54 days to the tenants of his six-unit building at 1505-41st Street in Borough Park, as well as leaving over 109 violations, 90 of them hazardous, uncorrected. Shenberger's building is located where there has been intense development activity and widespread reports of owner harassment of tenants.

After Judge Bank handed down his sentence on January 30th, the owner's lawyers won a two-week stay from Civil Court Judge Harry Michaelson, a former chief attorney for the city's now defunct Office of Rent Control. Meanwhile, tenants still had no heat. Pipes burst in the building, dumping several inches of water in the apartments of Patricia and Olga Cassano.

The tenants said Shenberger had threatened to "get" them for their court action against him. Two nights after the sentencing, a 3 a.m. firebombing shook the building next door to the Cassanos who reported they had seen the landlord on the block earlier that night.

"The tenants are panicked," said Susan Hamovitch, an organizer with the Borough Park Housing-Senior Citizens Project.

The following week Judge Bank lifted the stay on his order and Shenberger was arrested when he showed up in court on February 11. But an appellate judge, based on the claims of Shenberger's attorney that the owner had not had his day



in court, ordered him released a couple of days later. One of Shenberger's two lawyers is Edward Rapoport, chairman of Community Board 12 in Borough Park. Tenants had visited the community board weeks earlier, and met with District Manager Priscilla Celano, but had gotten no assistance.

A week after the Shenberger case, on February 8, Bank again jailed an owner, this time Henry Burke who had removed the burner from the boiler of his eight-unit building at 1446 Pacific Street.

Traditionally, said a housing attorney, Brooklyn Housing Court judges have been reluctant to jail owners. Tenant organizers say this is true because of ongoing cronyism and political ties between judges and owners. Bank's actions, in what has turned out to be the coldest winter in four years, may be a harbinger of changes on the way. □ T.R.

## MARCOS' LONG ISLAND HIDEAWAY

As powerful as Philippines dictator Ferdinand Marcos is, even he knows that his days in power are numbered. And like many deposed despots before him—the Shah of Iran, Nicaragua's Somoza—he's setting up residence in the United States in preparation for the time when the pressures of popular struggle become too much to bear. Where should he choose to establish such a retirement residence but Center Moriches, a sleepy Suffolk County town on the water with an abundance of gracious old homes that is also in the midst of an economic revitalization.

The Lindenmere, a 26-room mansion on Sedge-mere Road built in 1908, was many things before Marcos' wife Imelda picked it four

years ago as one of the couple's hideaways. It was designed by architect Stanford White and served as resort hotel, night club, restaurant and finally a health spa until a 1976 hurricane left it boarded up. Since then Mrs. Marcos has refurbished the Lindenmere in white and had a pool installed as well as a sandy beach on the property's waterfront. She has made several visits to the 10-acre estate and Center Moriches, according to a local paper, flying in by U.S. helicopter and accompanied by military personnel armed with machine guns. The Marcos' investment in Center Moriches was a prescient one. The town was recently designated as a target area by the Brookhaven Community Development Agency and will receive over \$2 million in federal funds to encourage revitalization. With land value growing and availability shrinking in the Hamptons, Center Moriches is being eyed for development. □ A.F.

## HOUSING NORTH OF THE BORDER

In the Great White North there's a low income housing advocate who's been keeping tabs on the Canadian government's track record on housing programs. David Hulchanski, according to a piece in the *Toronto Star*, has analyzed the programs created during the Trudeau administration from 1968–84 and come up with some amazing figures.

Hulchanski, a professor of community planning at the University of British Columbia, looked at the Multiple Unit Residential Building program (MURB) which allowed people with extra cash, like doctors and lawyers, to invest in MURBs and get a tax break. He found

that from 1976–82, such investments cost the federal and provincial governments \$1.32 billion in uncollected revenues. Apartments financed by the MURB program, he discovered, went primarily to the wealthy and had no rent controls.

Hulchanski also examined home ownership. In 1967, 62 percent of people in the lowest income brackets were home owners. That dropped to 43 percent by 1981 while people in the highest income level increased as home owners from 73 percent to 83 percent. The columnist who picked up on Hulchanski's work, David Lewis Stein, found the results startling and concluded, "Those who appear to have gained the most from subsidies were people who were already well off. It's clear that some new approaches to housing are needed. It's going to be interesting to see what Ottawa comes up with." □ A.F.

## SERMONS ON THE HOMELESS

The Cathedral of St. John the Divine invites the public

to join Sunday morning sermons which will bear witness to the tragedy of homelessness and move to establish housing as a right for all. For six consecutive weeks starting February 24, the church will host guest speakers and victims of homelessness who will address the problem and its causes. Following each sermon will be a luncheon-strategy meeting at which participants will pool energies and ideas for solutions. The schedule for remaining sermons, which are held at 11 a.m. at the Cathedral, 1047 Amsterdam Ave. at 112th St., is: March 10—Whoopi Goldberg, Actress; James Carroll, author, *Prince of Peace*; Annabel Nichols, Women in Need; and Bro. David Steindel-Rast, O.S.B., Benedictine monk; March 17—Rev. Donald Sakano, Catholic Charities; March 24—Robert Hayes, Coalition for the Homeless; March 31—Rev. Jesse Jackson.

Luncheon is at 1 p.m. in the Cathedral School with the guest speakers and is geared towards developing a strategy for a movement for housing as a human right. For more information call (212) 316-3171. □



Jesse Jackson. To give sermon on homeless.



## LEGISLATION: NYC

# The Mayor's Proposals

MAYOR ED KOCH UNVEILED THE first major housing proposals of his eight years in City Hall last month as part of his "State of the City" address. But examination by low income housing advocates has found that what the mayor called a "comprehensive strategy" for the city's housing needs falls far short.

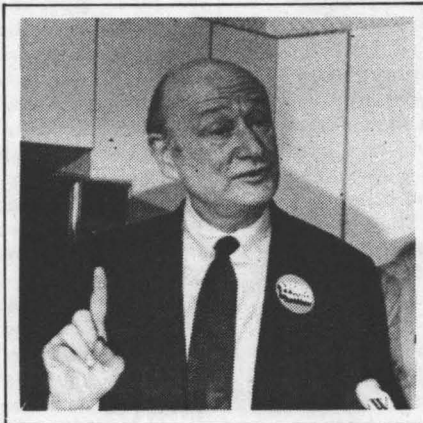
Following is a brief analysis of the housing production proposals and their impact, based on investigation made by the Association for Neighborhood and Housing Development and the Pratt Institute Center for Community and Environmental Development.

## Legislation Hurdles

Those organizations found the mayor's proposals hampered by legislative difficulties, in contradiction to earlier housing recommendations by the Governor, aimed mainly at middle income households and generating little new affordable low income shelter. According to Bonnie Brower, Association director, 75 percent of the mayor's proposed expenditures would be for middle income benefit, just six percent for low income families.

**A World Trade Center Funding Source:** The mayor said he would seek to increase payments the Port Authority-owned World Trade Center now makes to the city in lieu of taxes, from its current \$11 million level to over \$40 million per year. This would finance a bond issue of \$1 billion to be used over a five-year period for a variety of housing purposes.

The lion's share of this billion dollars would go to: 1) a concentrated "neighborhood rebuilding" program— new construction projects in areas of 15 to 25 blocks (Estimated city expenditure: \$250 million); and 2) as interest reduction on multifamily projects which are financed by the city's Housing Development Corporation. These projects are built as so-called "80/20"— market rate (read luxury housing) with 20 percent set aside for low income units. Smaller portions of the Trade Center bonds would go to repairing occupied and vacant city-owned buildings, and to boosting current city housing



Mayor Ed Koch.  
A boost for developers, little affordable housing.

rehabilitation programs.

This part of the mayor's proposal got the most attention because of the Trade Center aspect. One problem is that approval for sale or tax increases on the complex requires not just the okay of the Port Authority's 12 commissioners, but governors of both New York and New Jersey as well as possibly new action by both legislatures. Since it also competes directly with the Governor's proposal to use proceeds from Battery Park City for housing, its political fate seem dubious.

**City Bonds:** A big piece of the mayor's proposal is aimed at getting more tax exempt bond issues. He would use the city's Housing Development Corporation to carry this out, but he needs state approval to increase its bonding capacity to the \$2.2 billion he requests over five years. Since the mayor has been getting yearly increases of \$240 million already, the potential new funding is really closer to just \$850 million. And since this bond issue would go to all 80/20 projects, it will assist four market-rate units for each low income apartment.

**Municipal Assistance Corporation Funds:** These funds from escrowed city deposits for MAC bonds are already involved in city housing through a \$100 million commitment for 80/20

projects. In this case, however, the 20 percent will not be low income, but require a threshold income of \$14,500. The mayor would add \$125 million.

**Single-Family Bonds:** The Association called the mayor's proposal to also use the HDC for a one-billion-dollar bond issue for single-family housing, "A true exercise in smoke and mirrors." A similar city bill was shot down right away in the legislature last year since it conflicts with bond activity of other agencies. Also, the state is close to its allowable federal limit on bonds for single-family homes.

**City Capital Budget Funds:** Koch would allocate \$50 million of the city's capital budget "primarily" for infrastructure improvements to stimulate and reduce the cost of new assisted housing in poorer neighborhoods. "Other" capital budget funds (he didn't say how much) would buttress the World Trade Center bond funds for the rehab of city-owned buildings.

**Homeless Housing:** The mayor pledged (without citing a funding source) to increase the number of permanent apartments for the homeless in city owned buildings from the current level of 3,000 units per year to an added 4,000 over five years. He would also launch an experiment to house homeless families temporarily in 100 manufactured homes built on vacant city land.

## Counter Proposal

Meanwhile, ANHD, Pratt Center and other groups are working on a "counter proposal" tentatively identified as a "Housing for the People Program." The group has targetted six areas for action so far: 1) all salvageable city-owned buildings be made into low and moderate income housing through capital grants with nonprofit ownership; 2) target tax break programs for affordable low income housing; 3) include a low income housing requirement as part of any builder zoning bonuses; 4) strengthen tenant protections; 5) include nonprofit organizations as essential parts of any housing production program; 6) put a major funding in city code enforcement— both preventive inspections as well as acceleration of repairs. □T.R.



## Zoning Bonuses Planned

MAYOR KOCH'S "STATE OF THE City" address included substantial new zoning bonuses to developers of market rate housing. But while his administration opted to gamble on both of the zoning changes it recommended, it declined a natural opportunity to tie those developer bonuses to the creation of affordable housing.

"Inclusionary zoning"—a concept championed by the late planner Paul Davidoff—has received increasing attention within both the city planning department and nonprofit development circles. The plan would require builders of market-rate or luxury housing to provide a set percentage of low income, affordable apartments either within the same project or on another site.

The concept has become a hot political debate within and without the planning department and the 7-member planning commission. Some commissioners and planning staff believe it's time to try out the plan and that the mayor's proposed zoning waivers offered a good opportunity. But commission chairman Herbert Sturz remains dubious and key staff members are outright opposed.

What the mayor did propose were two major shifts in city zoning policies to accommodate builders of market-rate residential projects. One would reclassify some of the city's designated manufacturing areas as residential. Neighborhoods cited included Queens Boulevard in Elmhurst, Brooklyn's Mill Basin and strips like lower Sixth Avenue which are outside the "Manhattan Core," an area city planners now identify as Manhattan (with certain exceptions) between 96th Street and 14th Street.

The other change is also aimed at areas outside central Manhattan where the mayor asked the Planning Commission to waive requirements that developers provide more open space in order to maximize the number of apartments. The target there is the "Tower-in-the-Park" syndrome which planners say creates structures expensive to build and out of context with the rest of the neighborhood. The mayor would also reward any builder who can get a project underway within six years after such an amendment is passed with an added bonus of 20 percent greater apartment density.

With that incentive linked to

another mayoral proposal which would vastly increase the Section 421a tax exemptions for new multifamily buildings outside central Manhattan, the Koch administration hopes to spur a building surge in the boroughs.

The mayor's proposals, however, seek no public benefit from the developers other than the housing.

"The point of view of the mayor and of this department is that the mere provision of housing is a public good," commented Eric Kober, the planning department's coordinator of community development and housing policy.

Arguably, however, the public benefitting from market-rate housing is a fast dwindling strata of the city's population, and the more opportunities missed to get private developers of luxury housing to pitch in, the less housing there will be for everyone else.

"There's no consensus yet for inclusionary zoning," summed up Planning Commission member Susan Motley who has avidly pursued some form of inclusionary zoning mechanism. "It will be a tough fight to get it. But it's an issue that is not about to go away." □ T.R.

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## LEGISLATION: ALBANY

## The Governor's Proposals: Look Quick While You Can

by REV. DONALD A. SAKANO

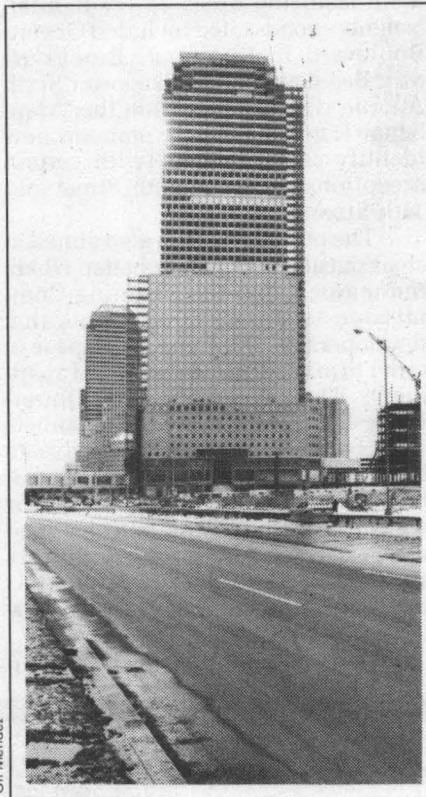
IN JANUARY, GOVERNOR CUOMO proposed a multi-year housing program designed to produce 80,000 housing units at a cost of \$3.5 billion. Without so much as drawing another breath, he assured his listeners that this program would "not place a burden on our taxing capacities or rely on massive assistance from Washington." This is a verbal rendition of three card monty at its very best. Our eyes want to believe that it's there—Wow! \$3.5 billion! for 80,000 units! But, alas, wishing doesn't make it so. It just ain't in the cards.

### Smoke and Mirrors

The Governor can speak about a massive housing initiative and a tax cut at the same time because he is dealing from a deck full of jokers. In this case the jokers are a variety of proposals based on tax-exempt bond financing. Almost all of the proposed housing program is either an extension of the existing bonding authority of the Housing Finance Agency (HFA) and the State of New York Mortgage Agency (SONYMA) or it is some new concoction of concepts that sounded "bold, innovative, and forward-thinking" in the State of the State speech, but were billed as "smoke and mirrors" by those in the know the next day.

First let me say a little about tax-exempt bond financing. Under federal auspices, local and state governments can convene capital for housing construction by issuing bonds that are free from federal income tax. Thus, marvelous to behold, the bonds can be sold at an interest rate that is less than taxable bonds. In turn, the funds can be lent out to housing developers at less than conventional lending rates (about three percentage points below market)!

As a public benefit, the Congress has insisted that multi-family housing built with tax-exempt financing have at least 20 percent of the units reserved for households who are at or below 80 percent of median income for the area (hence the nick-name "80/20"). State



A view of Battery Park City on Manhattan's West Side. Gov. Cuomo would use surplus revenues to fund housing.

finance agencies that issue tax-exempt bonds to reduce the mortgage rate for first-time homebuyers (usually by three percentage points) have to see that 20 percent of the loans are targeted into low or moderate income neighborhoods.

This summary of the wonderful world of tax-exempt bonds is meant to point out some of the strengths and weaknesses inherent in this form of housing finance. It is certainly true that a reduced mortgage interest rate for an owner (homeowners or multi-family developers) will reduce debt service and, therefore, should make the housing more affordable for more people. It must be understood, however, that an interest-reduction subsidy of three percentage points will not by

itself create housing affordable to low income people.

### Most Ill-Housed Left Out

There can be no debate to the statement that the most ill-housed people in this state are at income levels that simply cannot afford to live in housing that must be financed by a mortgage of any kind. Even one at zero interest rate! The Governor's proposals that are based entirely on tax-exempt bond financing do not seem to acknowledge this problem. And the use of the word "low income" in relation to these programs does not magically make it so.

There are basically five components to the Governor's \$3.5 billion program. \$2.25 billion of it simply is an extension of programs run now by HFA and SONYMA, namely—The Loan-to-Lenders ("80/20") Program and the Affordable Ownership Program, respectively. The delivery power of these programs to low income people is zilch.

In answer to the question, "What, then, can be done for low income people?", our Governor responds with two uses of tax-exempt bonds that are hazy, mazy, and crazy to all of us who have been yearning to see hard state dollars behind low income housing. One idea involves a \$1 billion bond issue retired entirely by "anticipated surplus revenues" from "some public authorities." Evidently this refers to Battery Park City Authority or the World Trade Center, but the authorization for such a scheme involves two chiefs of state (Cuomo and Koch), two state legislators (New York and New Jersey) and the Boards of two public authorities. Although the goal is good—the development of housing without debt service for low income people—don't hold your breath waiting for this one.

The other Cuomo proposal using an "innovative" approach to tax-exempt financing, calls for a \$13 million appropriation from the state budget to back something called "variable-rate" bonds. Sold at short terms, these bonds pay much lower interest rate than longer term bonds. Thus the cheaper money can be used to reduce the rents in the 20 percent units set-aside for moderate income down to levels affordable to low income people. When the short term bonds have to be refinanced, the \$13 million would be



used to make up the short-fall if the interest rate is unfavorable. Get it? Don't worry, nobody else will either. Let's move on to the only thing in the Governor's package that has a chance of being meaningful.

### The Housing Trust Fund

The idea here is to create an on-going, self-replenishing pool of money from what is called a "dedicated source of revenue" that would be targeted for low income housing. Actually, we have such a creature now in New York State called the "mortgage recording fee" that fuels the SONYMA Insurance Fund. Currently, about \$60 million of this money goes uncommitted and is returned to the general revenue pot every year. The Governor is proposing that \$25 million of it be put into a Housing Trust Fund.

The good news about the trust fund proposal is that we're at last talking about hard dollars. The bad news is that it's \$25 million out of \$3.5 billion. Other bad news—Lord, when will it ever end!—is the actual substance of

the Governor's bill. It is evident that the Governor's Office doesn't talk to knowledgeable people. If they had they would have been told to include some critical elements in the bill. Among them:

(1) The Housing Trust Fund must be serious about creating housing for low income people by calling for the use of capital grants as the principle financing mechanism.

(2) Nonprofit community-based organizations must play a central role in the development and management of the housing financed through the trust fund.

(3) The fund must be used to finance new efforts and not be used to take the place of other programs, i.e., the Homeless Housing and Assistance Program, the Urban Initiatives Program and the Rural Revitalization program.

(4) The fund's administrative structure must be simple and oriented to making the program immediately workable for low income people and organizations.

(5) Finally, the funds for the Housing Trust Fund must be provided for in the state budget that is due to be enacted by the legislature by April 1. There must be no statutory language that "recaptures" unspent funds after a year.

Yes, dear reader, all we have out of \$3.5 billion in fluff is a \$25 million potential program. But the opportunity of getting a Housing Trust Fund established in New York State is too important to mess up. Support for a principled trust fund must come from you. Don't think it is in Albany. It is going to take a broad coalition of people from around the state to get where we want to be. Let's watch this one carefully and put the Governor and the legislature on notice that we want a program that works for low income people. And we want it now! □

*Rev. Donald A. Sakano is director of the Neighborhood Preservation Office of the New York Archdiocese Catholic Charities. He writes regularly on housing legislation for City Limits.*

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## The city's problem is mismatched priorities: good prenatal care costs \$700 per pregnancy; but low weight infants can cost as much as \$1,500 per day in specialized hospital units.

### What Can I Do?

TWO IMPORTANT EFFORTS ARE CURRENTLY UNDERWAY, AND YOU CAN HELP. A Statewide Coalition to Fight Infant Mortality has been formed and is organizing major activities for Mother's Day, in support of Assemblyman Green's legislation (A. 1021). The activities include a lobbying day in Albany on May 7th, and a large City Wide Rally on Saturday, May 11th. For more information and to get involved contact Safia Bandele at (718) 735-1903 or Judi Clark in Assemblyman Green's office at (718) 857-1881.

A Prenatal Care Steering Committee was set up following a conference in June, 1984. This committee is monitoring the setting up of and implementation of the city and state prenatal care initiatives, and advocating for better services. For more information contact Karen Thomas at (718) 875-7370 or Judy Wessler at (212) 431-7200. □T.R.

the Mott Haven section of the South Bronx, over 50 percent of the pregnant women had late or no prenatal care.

In 1983, in the Fort Greene section of Brooklyn, the Health and Hospitals Corporation spent the better part of the year closing the municipal Cumberland Hospital. In spite of promises that there would be no interruption in medical services delivered, there was. A planning process was begun in February, 1983 to have a Neighborhood Family Care Center in place when Cumberland closed. But the closing was so poorly handled that there was a long hiatus before services were functioning well (it took one year to hire nurse midwives) and to inform the community that services were available.

Not surprisingly, this community achieved the dubious distinction of having the highest rate of Infant Mortality of any district in the city for that year (22.3 infant deaths per 1,000 live births).

A recently published study by the City Health Department shows that babies born to homeless pregnant women living in welfare hotels in New York City in 1982 and 1983, were more than twice as likely to have low birth weight. Again, these are the infants that are much more likely to die in the first 28 days of life. The homeless pregnant women received significantly less prenatal care, and of course were living in very stressful conditions.

### Why Can't Something Be Done?

The City Health Department knew what to do, and how to do it in 1940.

The department's campaign to reduce infant mortality in the primarily Hispanic part of the East Harlem community was successful. Professionals within the Health Department also did important research and published many studies in professional journals over the intervening years since the 1940s on this very subject. But the activist role of taking direct action to change the unfortunate statistics was not consistently applied over the years—even though it was shown to make a difference.

Although the Infant Mortality Rate has continued to decline overall, it remains unacceptably and needlessly high for black and Hispanic infants in poor communities around the city. One would hate to believe that the race or economic status of the dying infants influenced the inaction of the Health Department.

In February of 1984, the Redistribute America Movement/Downtown Welfare Advocate Center—advocacy groups for welfare recipients—working with Legal Services, petitioned the state Departments of Health and Social Services. The petition stated that “. . . the quality of care available to a pregnant woman in New York State and the likelihood of a positive birth outcome still depend largely on where she lives, her economic status, and her race.”

The groups requested that the department propose rules that would make prenatal care services a public health responsibility in New York State, which would then at least break down the financial barriers that exist

and make this service more available to poor women. With the assistance of City Council President Carol Bellamy's office, more than 100 organizations and elected officials endorsed this petition and the issue received much press coverage.

In March of 1984, Assemblyman Roger Green, from Brooklyn's Fort Greene section, introduced state legislation that would allocate \$20 million of state funds to provide prenatal care and nutrition to poor women. The bill also recognizes the need for community outreach and education to make the program effective.

The information provided about the crisis proportions of the situation, and advocacy efforts by Green, Assemblyman Jim Tallon of Binghamton and the Black and Puerto Rican State Legislative Caucus, led to the legislature including \$7.5 million in the state budget passed at the end of March of 1984, to provide prenatal care services to poor women around the state. Funding for these programs only began last month. As a result, despite promises by the State Commissioner of Health, the Governor's recent proposed budget did not recommend refunding this program, but rather called for rolling over the monies that are left from this year.

Some funds were won on the city level when the City Council and the Board of Estimate placed \$2.7 million in the Health and Hospital Corporation's budget that was approved in June of 1984, for prenatal care programs. The city administration, including the Mayor and the City Department of Health (whose services have been greatly decimated since the fiscal crisis of the 1970s) finally awoke to the need for action and in August announced some additional monies for new prenatal care programs, which are just getting off the ground. This includes a much-needed “Pregnancy Healthline” for women to call for information and for help in locating a service or making an appointment. The Healthline's number is (212) 230-1111.

But despite all of these activities, much still needs to be done. Our babies are still dying. □

*Judy Wessler is a health services advocate for Community Action Legal Services, Inc.*

BY ROBERT NEUWIRTH

From the farthest corner of Hunters Point, at the edge of Newtown Creek, all the way to 44th Drive, you can look out over the East River at Manhattan. Midtown is spread out across the water—gleaming in the sun, noiseless and immaculate, a shining city across the river.

It's a snapshot, a postcard view. And this view is about to change the face of Hunters Point and, perhaps, all of Long Island City.

Because of that view, the Hunters Point waterfront is being developed by the city and state. Although official plans are not out, the word is that factories with 500 jobs that are along the water now will be replaced by luxury housing and office towers. One report suggests that rents will be in the \$1,000 to \$2,000 range—for a one-bedroom apartment.

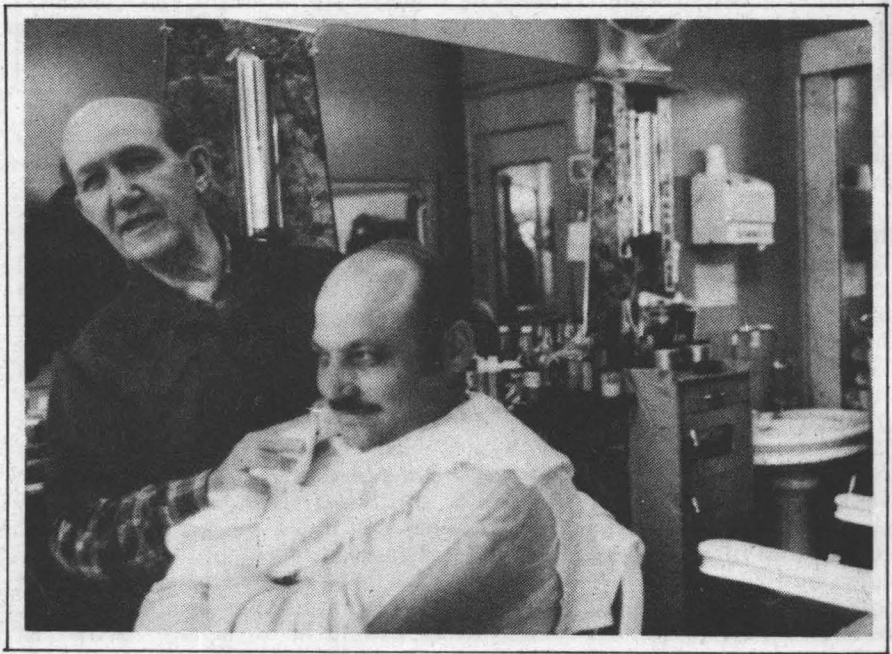
It's a developer's dream: 91.6 acres, a mile of waterfront, mostly undeveloped, with a spectacular view of the midtown skyline. The agency controlling this development is the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, a two-state empire of bus stations, buses, port projects and, most recently, real estate, as owner of the World Trade Center.

Under a special law which took effect on August 1, 1984, the Port Authority was granted the power to coordinate land improvements and, if necessary, to use eminent domain to assemble the land around the waterfront. The Port Authority is currently planning waterfront projects in Hunters Point, Queens and Hoboken, New Jersey.

The Hunters Point waterfront is an enormous tract, larger than the old Penn yard on Manhattan's West Side that is called Lincoln West. According to Port Authority reports on the project, the development may be worth over \$1 billion. Without revealing plans, the Port Authority already has the blessing of Mayor Koch and Queens Borough President Manes.

The law allows the Port Authority to construct "hotels, marinas, commercial offices, . . . facilities which serve conference, convention, recreation or

## Long Island City's Billion-Dollar View



Hunters Point, on Vernon Boulevard.  
A fragile community, vulnerable to upscale development.

entertainment purposes or are retail establishments." The Port Authority has the power to lease or sell the waterfront land to private developers.

### Keeping It Under Wraps

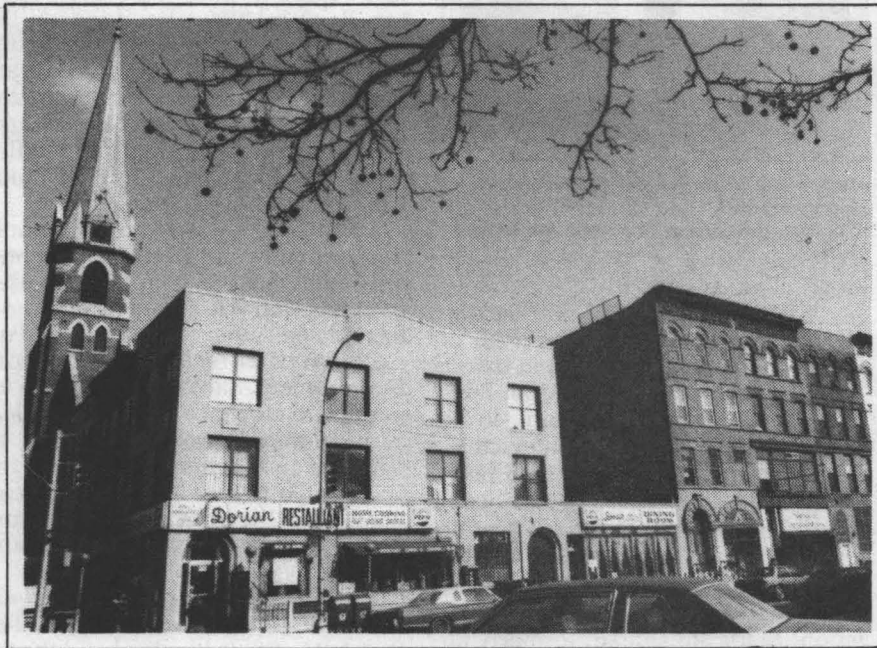
Perhaps because of initial legislative opposition to the waterfront projects, the Port Authority is reluctant to talk about Hunters Point. Eileen Daly, the Authority's project manager for Hunters Point, would not discuss specific plans. "We are in the middle of our master planning process," she said. Daly did say that planners had come up with six alternative schemes for development, but declined to make

them public. She admits, however, that the Port Authority has held conversations about marketing with private developers. "It's viewed as a very attractive site for mixed use development," she said, but she would not confirm what developers were contacted.

John Beyer, one of the partners in the consulting team hired by the Port Authority to examine land use along the waterfront, would only give general information. He acknowledged that some development alternatives have been presented but insisted, "They're not public record yet." Everything is on a "conceptual basis," he said. However, Beyer refers to the



**H**unter's Point, a 5,000-person neighborhood on the edge of Queens' Long Island City, where the Port Authority is planning a major office and housing development, is bracing for change.



The spire of St. Mary's Church on Vernon Blvd.  
Will waterfront developers forget about the residents of Hunters Point?

waterfront as having the potential to be "a major city within the city."

Betty Mackintosh, director of Hunters Point project planning for the Queens Office of the Department of City Planning, insists that the waterfront project "is at a planners notebook stage. It's just not public yet."

Despite Mackintosh's assertion, other planners in the Queens office have been talking of Hunters Point in terms of 3,000 apartments and between two million and five million square feet of office space. These figures are rough, one was heard to say, "but the range is probably not going to change a lot."

To put this in context, 5 million square feet of offices is about as much as is in the four office towers proposed in the 42nd Street project. Three thousand apartments is approximately what Donald Trump is proposing for Lincoln West. It is Manhattan density come to Queens.

The pattern of secrecy disturbs residents and businesspeople of Hunters Point. They're wondering what's up for them. And they're having a hard time getting answers.

Rumors have been flying. Some say the Port Authority is interested in moving development inland, beyond the 5th Street line, where residential

dwellings and small businesses begin, perhaps taking property up to Vernon Boulevard, the major commercial street in the area. Although the Port Authority did not respond to inquiries, planner John Beyer, indicated that his report will cover all of Hunters Point, beyond Vernon Boulevard to Jackson Avenue. The whole community, Beyer adds, "has a certain Soho or Greenwich Village atmosphere."

### There Goes The Neighborhood

Longtime Hunters Point residents remember a different neighborhood. They remember the trolleys turning around the yard at the corner of Vernon Boulevard at 50th Street and the 'penny bridge' over Newtown Creek to Brooklyn. "You could cross the creaky, wooden bridge for free," the saying went, but it "wasn't worth a penny."

Hunters Point was the place to be. People went to St. Mary's church and school or studied at PS 1. Factory workers from the varnish and paint companies that sprang up in Long Island City would arrive early each morning. In the afternoons they could be found in the many diners and bars on the main streets.

When Sal Anzalone moved to Hunters Point in 1952, it was a thriving community. A machinist, he commuted to work to a factory on Varick Street in Manhattan. After five years in Hunters Point, he bought the Cassino, a restaurant and bar on Vernon Boulevard and he's owned it ever since. In more recent years he has also acquired a few other buildings along Vernon Boulevard.

Sal Anzalone remembers the public baths on 47th Avenue. He remembers the rows of houses that were razed to make way for the ramps for the Midtown Tunnel and the construction of the Pulaski bridge. He remembers the people who used to live on 46th Road. An iron foundry replaced them.

Most of the paint companies are gone now. PS 1, long abandoned by the Board of Education, was turned into arts studio and gallery space in 1976. And the public baths are no more. The neighborhood shrunk as population fell from almost 20,000 in the 1940s to just above 5,000 today.

"I'm really concerned for tomorrow," Anzalone says. He was one of the people fighting to change the zoning

## Estimates call for up to 5 million square feet of office space and 3,000 luxury apartments. It is Manhattan's density come to Queens.

in the area to preserve housing. The struggle culminated in 1981 when the Special Mixed-Use District legislation was passed. The mixed-use zoning allows residential and manufacturing/industrial uses to exist side-by-side, but protects against undue conversion or demolition of housing.

Anzalone hopes for the best out of the Waterfront project. "We are not particularly against it. But we feel that this waterfront project should not get pushed west of 5th Street." He feels that the Special Zoning will act as a buffer but he knows how fragile it is.

He cites an example of a company that demolished a two-family building and erected a commercial structure without a permit. Anzalone calls this "an injustice to the neighborhood." Residents organized and protested to City Planning.

Anzalone says that City Planning is proposing to change the zoning in the area adjacent to the waterfront from M-3 (heavy manufacturing) to M-1 (light manufacturing). "The city always says they don't have anything for us. Of course that's our concern too. An M-1? What's consisted in this M-1? We don't know."

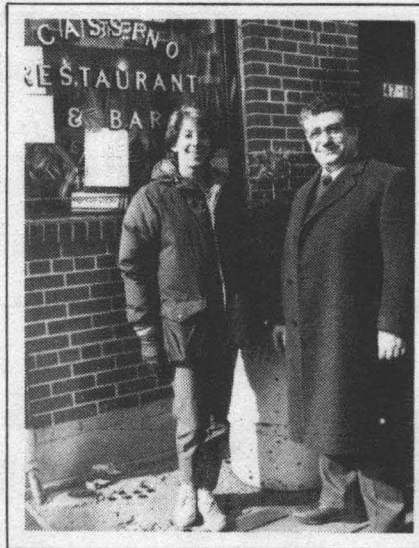
### Profit and Loss

Anzalone insists that the neighborhood people should not be scared of new development. "We are here," he states. "We have a future in Hunters Point. We feel we are the core of this area and we want to protect each and every one in the neighborhood."

Others are not so confident. In the Dorian Coffee Shop one recent morning, talk turned to the future of the neighborhood.

"We want to know up front exactly what's going down, what their plans are," says Joan Colletti. "We don't want to be lied to. Until we know exactly what they're going to do, how can we decide what we want?" Colletti, born and raised in Hunters Point and a social worker for the Catholic Archdiocese, is worried about displacement.

"Tenants will be the first to be displaced," she says. "But homeowners, particularly the elderly, will eventually be displaced for two reasons. The skyrocketing property taxes and therefore rents. Due to higher taxes they will lack the resources to keep up with maintenance."



Barb Rosenhol

**Debra Whitelaw and Sal Anzalone outside his restaurant.**

*"We are the core of this area. We have a future."*

Sitting at the counter at the Dorian, Neil agrees. He has lived in Hunters Point for 33 years and drives a truck for a living. "Within about five years the highrises are going to be going up." He views it as inevitable. "People who have houses for 40 years got them for peanuts. Now they're being offered hundreds of thousands of dollars."

Some people don't want to stop it. They're aiming to profit off the speculation. Mark Fleishman, formerly an owner of Studio 54, owns the Waters Edge Cafe on 44th Drive next to the proposed Waterfront Project. Today, as two years ago when it opened, the Waters Edge is the only fancy restaurant to come to Hunters Point.

Fleishman is planning a major catering and banquet facility across the street from the cafe on the site of an old beverage warehouse.

The Waters Edge leases its space from the City Department of Ports and Terminals. Although financial terms are not reported in the lease, Community Board 2 members say the original lease approved by the Community Board was not the same as the lease the city gave to Fleishman. The lease gives Fleishman the right to develop the public pier adjacent to his restaurant

as a marina and an extension of his business. But the Board had wanted the pier to be retained for the public because it is the only unobstructed public access to the waterfront. "We should have a copy before it's signed," says Sal Anzalone, "Not that we get one thing and he signs another."

### Getting The Business

Other entrepreneurs who do not own waterfront restaurants, are more concerned. Rudolph Dworsak has been Vice President of Ampion Chemical Company since it moved to Hunters Point in 1939. His office, on the second floor of a building that is one of the few remaining from the old Standard Oil installation that dominated Hunters Point at the turn of the century, shows its age. The desks and office equipment are all dated, as if not much has changed since 1939.

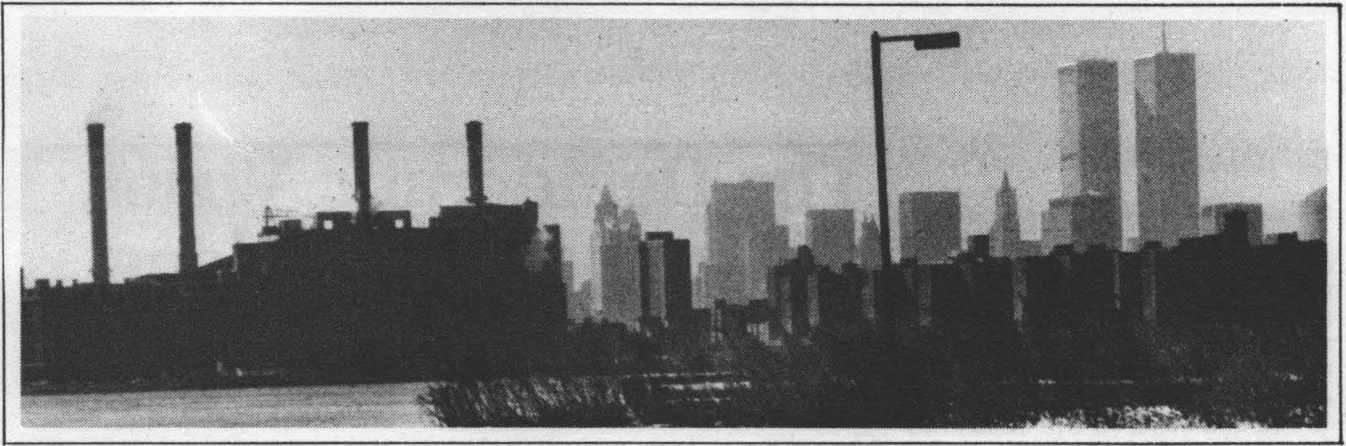
"The first we heard on the whole deal, when we got anything concrete, only goes back a couple of weeks," Dworsak said. He recently received a letter dated January 17th, from the Port Authority's Director of Waterfront Development, Sal Semperi, asking for permission to make various technical surveys around Dworsak's property, "as part of a comprehensive study of the Hunters Point area." The letter never mentioned the impending waterfront development or the possibility of land sale and condemnation.

"This is the only thing that has you a little uptight," Dworsak says. "The Port Authority is involved and they're a State agency. So they could come in with their power of eminent domain."

There is another concern Dworsak mentions. Some of the large businesses in the area have already made their arrangements. "I hear that Pepsi has already made their deal. They're out of here just about. They've got just a minimal operation."

Pepsi is consolidating their Hunters Point facility into a large plant at College Point. For this move they have received some generous city, state, and federal subsidies: a \$2.1 million mortgage from the city's Public Development Corporation, a \$4 million Federal Urban Development Action Grant, \$1 million from the State Job Development Authority, and \$475,000 from the city's Revolving Loan Fund. Other businesses recently relo-





Beth Rosenhain

A view of Manhattan across the East River from the mouth of Newtown Creek. Waterfront development with Manhattan style density.

cated from Hunters Point have also received city assistance.

Norval Cement is the only business in the waterfront area which actually needs the water to survive. "If they go ahead with it," says Plant Manager Joe Lonardo, "The rents will be out of sight." Lonardo says there have been "all kinds of reports that they're going to break ground in 1986." The Port Authority talked of relocation, he says, "but they haven't elaborated on their plans" for the present businesses. "Our position is that we want to continue to do business here," he emphasizes.

At Greiner and Maltz, one of the largest commercial real estate firms doing business in Long Island City, Dick Maltz predicts that the manufacturing companies will leave, giving way to commercial and service businesses.

"Fifteen or twenty years ago, we used to sell land by the acre. Now we sell it by the foot," says Maltz. And current prices, he adds, are "astronomical." Maltz sees the trend continuing. "If you stand in front of a steamroller and put your hands up, all you get is rolled over — and that's what's going to happen in Hunters Point."

One who perhaps typifies the concerns of the businessmen in the Hunters Point area is Arthur Nathanson. Nathanson has worked at Industrial Supply Corporation on Vernon Boulevard for 36 years. He has owned it for 18 years and has developed a steady clientele; of businesses, artists and film studios. He also owns the building.

"A lot of the neighborhood is running scared right now." Personally, Nathanson says, "Of course I'm terrified, I'd have to change my whole set up here and that would kill me."

### Clouded Future

In response to the waterfront plan, the community has formed a Local Development Corporation to gain information and amenities from the proposed project. The statement of the LDC, at a recent public hearing, demands that the neighborhood start getting many of the services that it has been denied. The nearest hospital, for instance, is four miles away, the nearest school almost a mile. Hunters Point, the LDC says, deserves services. Since over 50 percent of Hunters Point's residents live in one- or two-family houses, the LDC is also asking for some kind of rent protection for tenants of small buildings.

Debra Whitelaw, an active Hunters Point resident, is chair of the Housing Committee of the LDC and has been shepherding its proposals to the City Planning Commission and the Port Authority. Among them, she says, are that the project helps meet a crucial local need for subsidized senior citizen housing, and that a housing trust fund be set up with contributions from incoming developers according to the number of luxury units they erect. The fund would go towards low income housing and homesteading of vacant buildings.

According to observers, the Port Authority could have attempted to build a less fancy industrial waterfront project in Hunters Point, using their industrial development powers. They could also have moved years ago to stabilize the declining industrial base in the area.

Manhattan Assemblyman Jerrold Nadler made this point when he battled at the State legislature against allowing the Port Authority to do waterfront developments.

Nadler's contention to the legislature last year was that the Port Authority should be strengthening manufacturing districts and neighborhood commercial zones.

Although they claim to be consulting with the community, the Port Authority did not make much effort to comment for this article. They have not said anything publicly about the proposal for the waterfront except that a project plan should be ready in about two months, which is the same time that they are due to submit a report to the State Legislature on their progress in achieving waterfront development.

If you look out on Hunters Point from the Manhattan side of the East River, you can see the Pepsi Cola sign with its tilted, twisty bottle. You can see the modern but now abandoned Daily News plant on the point. The old railroad transfer bridges that loaded box cars onto barges for transportation around that harbor, are rusting, shades of their former glory, advertising, "Long Island, Long Island," in a mute redundancy.

Behind all this you can see the spire of St. Mary's Church, where much of the Hunters Point community worships. With developers' eyes, it's easy to forget there's a residential community there.

Through the Port Authority's plan, the shining city across the river is invading. It's the tough road ahead of the Hunters Point community to make sure that the shining city doesn't eat them in the name of waterfront revitalization. □

Rob Neuwirth is a freelance writer who is active in development issues in New York.

BY TOM ROBBINS

It was mid-afternoon when the February rainstorm became a torrent of hail and thunder sending grade schoolers who had been ambling home from P.S. 150 on 43rd Avenue in Sunnyside, Queens racing down the side streets as the hail hammered at the slate roofs of the red brick homes.

At mid-block on 47th Street, two boys holding their books above their heads for cover, made a sharp left turn and scampered down a narrow paved pathway between the houses. Down the center courtyard, unhindered by fences, they emerged onto the next street and dived toward the shelter of a front porch.

Not all of the visions of the builders of America's first planned "garden city" community have held up as well as that still precious network of pathways and shortcuts. Many of the once-open common courtyards are fenced off entirely or partially blocked. The city's biggest private park is better maintained now, but a few years ago it was in graffiti-covered disrepair. Each block has at least one car parked in a driveway which was meant to be a front yard.

But handing down social ideals from generation to generation is hard enough within families, let alone communities. They need to be reborn outside the formality of deeds and restrictive covenants. Now, the semi-utopian community which headquartered the radical American Labor Party in the 1930s, and went on to help send the first Conservative Party member to the state legislature in the 1970s, is trying to rebuild the systems of open space, buildings and people which make up Sunnyside Gardens' egalitarian plan.

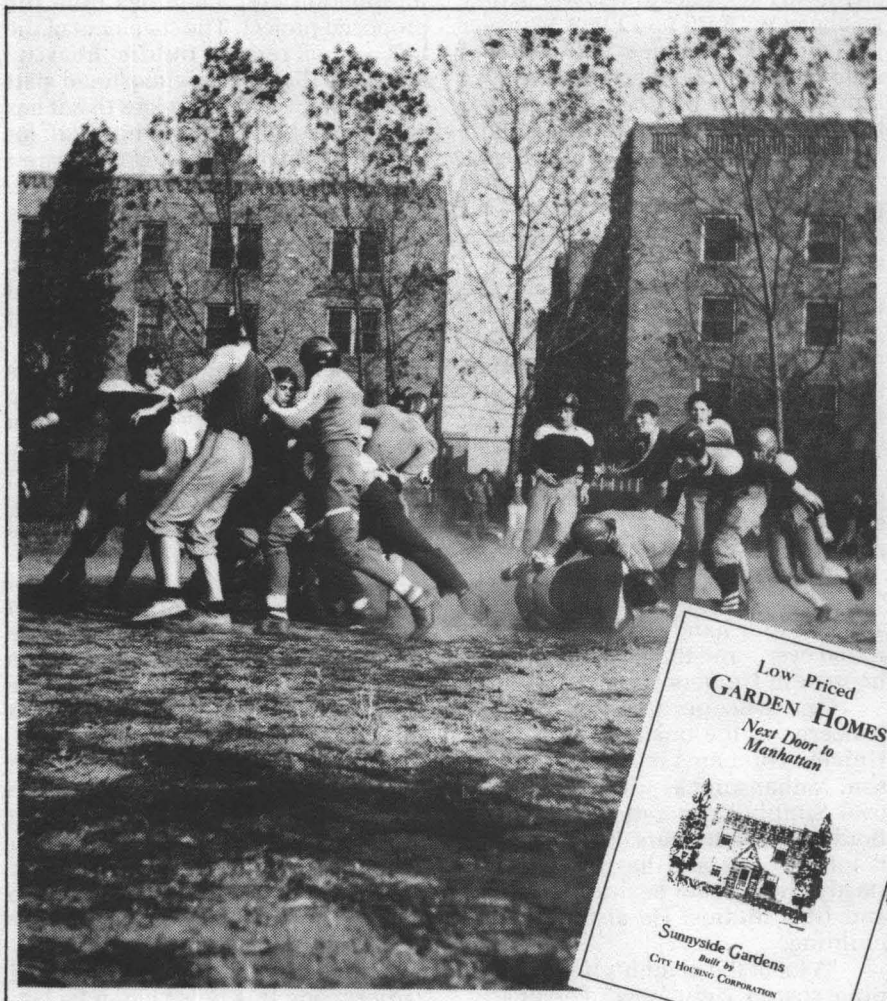
### Historic Designation

Sixty years after ground was broken for an American version of England's garden cities — a place that would humanize the metropolis and foster democratic ideals — at least part of the social and aesthetic dream of its visionary builders seems assured for posterity.

Last fall, the 14-square, tree-lined blocks and the 600 red brick homes and eight apartment buildings of Sunnyside Gardens were accepted onto the

## The Democratic Vision of Sunnyside Gardens

Light, trees, common space and affordability were the keys to Sunnyside Gardens experiment. Sixty years later, neighbors are still trying to make it work in a now historic community.



Football game in the park, 1938, and a brochure for the new development. Sunnyside Gardens, built on democratic ideals, offered a respite from the metropolis.



**Almost from the start, property rights conflicted with the community's heady social ideas.**



Kenneth Clark

**Pathway through the Gardens to 47 St.  
Common courtyards, a collectively run park and an abundance of greenery.**

National Register of Historic Places.

That history began in 1924, just a couple of blocks from where the Flushing line rumbles along its huge concrete viaduct down the middle of Queens Boulevard. It was there that architect Clarence Stein, landscape artist Henry Wright and developer Alexander Bing set out to turn 70 acres of marshy land alongside the Long Island Rail Road Yards into a model urban community.

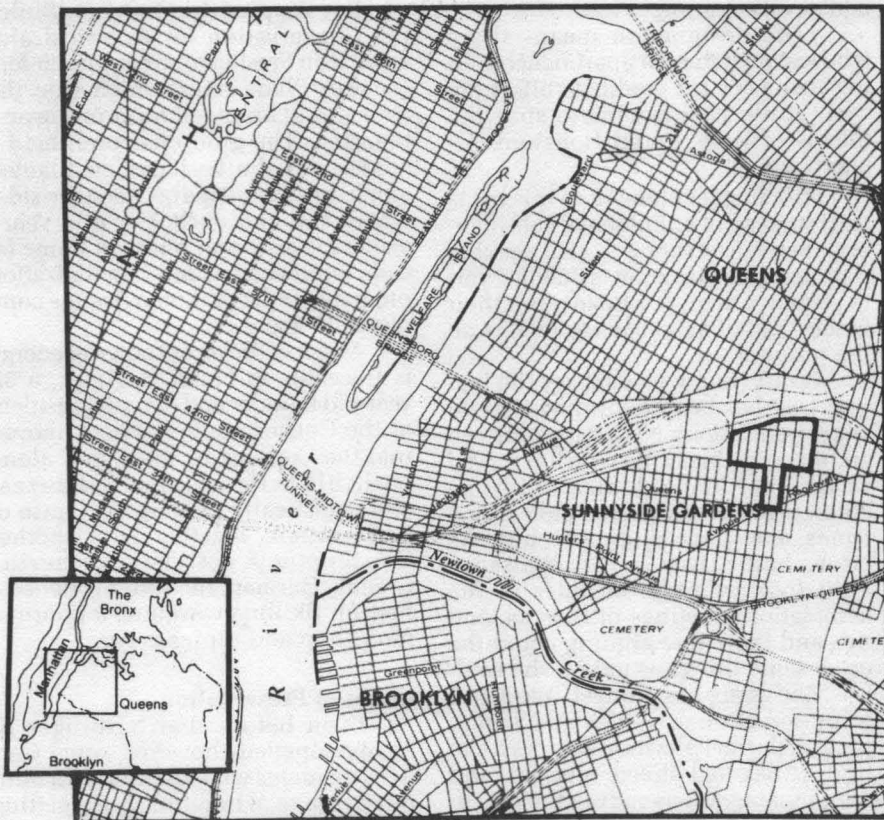
Within just a few minutes of midtown Manhattan via bridge and train, but with a population just one-quarter of the density of the average teeming city block, Garden residents would have the best of cosmopolitan urban, and leafy, airy suburban worlds.

Moreover, a combination of common interior courtyards which would pick up where smaller private gardens ended, jointly maintained by homeowners and renters, a collectively operated private park and recreation system, and an abundance of trees and shrubs would forge a true democratic community out of the residents whose incomes would range from lower- to upper-middle class.

**Foreclosures**

But almost from the start, property rights conflicted with the heady social ideals. Sunnyside Gardens' democratic vistas hit a nasty snag when fully 60 percent of the original homebuyers lost their homes to a wave of Depression-era mortgage foreclosures which swept through Queens. Not that the Gardeners, nearly half of whom had moved to Sunnyside from the Lower East Side carrying their radical politics with them, went quietly. Barbed wire and sandbags blocked the way of evicting sheriffs who were likely to be dredged in flour by angry residents. Marchers carrying coffins and beating drums descended onto the offices of the City Housing Corporation which had built the project, but now was calling its mortgage notes due.

What remained of the democratic community was rocked even more in the mid-1960s when the 40-year deed covenants which mandated the open courtyards, and assessed dues to pay for their upkeep, expired. Many homeowners, seeking privacy as well as more space for their children to play



(kids were supposed to take their games to the community park), extended their fences all the way back to the 100-foot property line, cutting off the open courtyards and the neighborly intermingling Stein and Wright had carefully designed. Angry disputes between neighbors were common and long-lasting. Of the nine interior courtyards only five retained their original configurations.

### Special District

Courtyard fencing might have extended even further if not for the efforts of a band of residents active in a local reform Democratic Party club to have the remaining open space and building scale incorporated into the area's zoning.

In 1974, the city ruled the Gardens a special Planned Community Preservation District, enjoining owners from further carving into the open courtyards or cutting away the curbs to make front yards into driveways.

But while the zoning changes slowed the Gardens' conversion into neatly squared pieces of private property (poaching on the zoning rules continued and still does), it did not revive the ailing courtyards or other common space. With the end of the dues assessments, the structure of court associations and trustees which maintained and safeguarded the parks and open space, also collapsed. In fact, as the overall population of the Gardens became increasingly elderly, the ability of many homeowners to pay for the grounds' upkeep was considerably diminished. Many common areas fell into disrepair. Despite several failed attempts, nobody managed to put together an organization to try again.

### Launching the Conservancy

But in 1981, an organization structured around the old court associations was formed by a mix of older preservation-minded residents and newcomers with similar interests.

Now, where mutual commitment to cooperative community has faltered over the years, the Sunnyside Gardens Conservancy seeks to rekindle that spirit through tax incentives and outside funding.

Last September's inclusion of Sunnyside Gardens on the National



John Grabec, left, and Frank Havlicek of Sunnyside Gardens. "We're not highbrow preservationists."

Register was the culmination of a year-long effort by that group, which tackled the project with the aid and advice of the Trust for Public Land, a national conservation group.

The designation means those who restore homes or apartment buildings can earn tax credits to offset the cost, while it also aims to spur the interest of banks, foundations and corporate givers.

As a further element of this backyard strategy of enlightened self-interest, the Conservancy is also seeking state legislation to grant tax deductions to property owners who tear out their fences and donate new easements on the property.

Conservancy leaders say the biggest task has been reforming the old court associations. Nina Rappaport, an architectural historian who has served as Director and the only full-time employee for the group, noted that times may have changed, but the issues have stayed largely the same. "You look over the minutes of the association meetings of the '30s and '40s and they were arguing about the exact same things as today," she said.

The group has plunged into a host of preservation activities and is tapping all the revitalization sources it can find. It has had streets repaved (and even renamed, persuading the city to

add the original names to the numbers which replaced them in the 1930s), operated a city-funded home facelift program, retaining Chris McAninch and Ray Peppi of the Center for Building Conservation for technical aid; hired Joan Preslier to survey the 50-foot London Plane trees which line the streets, and arranged for pruning and planting. The group has even held a contest for the best garden planted along the front strips between the sidewalks and the curb. On this year's agenda is a second phase of home facade improvement and a revitalization program for the Skillman Avenue commercial strip.

Much of the recent surge of energy is traceable to Frank Havlicek, a 37-year-old founder and current president of the Conservancy. Havlicek moved into the Gardens in 1981, and, along with his wife, Louise Safarazza, enthusiastically took up the cause of preservation. Together with another Conservancy activist, Katherine Greenly Herman, the couple opened a first on Skillman Avenue, a gourmet food shop and espresso bar.

### Issues of Preservation

Even before that harbinger of change opened, however, some Gardens residents who identify with Sunnyside's radical traditions were getting



**"I don't care if it takes ten or twenty years for the fences to come down. What's important is that we establish a sense of community."**

dubious. "Historic designation is nice," said Matt Edel, an urban studies professor at Queens College who moved to the Gardens in 1972 and with his wife has raised a family there. "But the real job was getting the special district zoning in '74."

"They're out to gentrify the neighborhood," one local community worker put it bluntly.

Some have raised, though fairly quietly, the appropriateness of using the federal Community Development money the city has allotted to the Conservancy for facade improvements, since those funds are supposed to be earmarked for low and moderate income projects. They also point to the rising house prices and ask if the current preservation activity is aimed mainly at boosting home values. According to realtor Lois Schenck, who shares her office with the Conservancy, a one-family home sells for up to \$140,000; a two-family for \$190,000.

But most resident concern is intangible. They look askance at the new street signs which read "46/Bliss St." or "45/Packard St." on the north, Garden side of Skillman Avenue, and plain "46 St." and "45 St." on the south. The fear seems to be that, somehow, the Gardens' historical and democratic ideals will wind up as daintily packaged goodies on the shelf of Skillman Avenue's new gourmet shop.

### Rebuilding the Structures

Frank Havlicek strides through the streets of Sunnyside Gardens taking pleasure in knowing and greeting most of the neighbors he passes. "People were sure I was going to run for Assembly, when I first started," he says. Now a labor lawyer for NBC and a teacher of public policy at Columbia, Havlicek worked for Mayor Ed Koch as a special legal and policy advisor but left at the end of the mayor's first term.

"The structures in the Gardens which had people talking to each other had disappeared," he says. The community was badly fractured and little was being done before the conservancy started up. Getting the court association going was the major task. In an article co-authored with architect Michael Kwartler in a 1982 *New York Affairs*, Havlicek characterized the backyard disputes as a modern version of the "range wars" of the old west.

"You wouldn't believe how angry and crazy people can get when you ask them not to put up a fence."

The ten-year-old zoning ordinance, however, gives Gardeners the right not just to ask, but to call in the law. But even as he pointed out to a visitor an illegal driveway built after the special district was passed, Havlicek shook his head. "If you want to maintain a sense of community, suing your neighbors seems like a funny way to do it."

In their article, Havlicek and Kwartler assert that many of the antagonisms which have divided the community are reflections of blue collar and white collar division and conservative and liberal political bents. Those are splits the Conservancy aims to surmount. On a recent Saturday morning, Havlicek caught the arm of John Grabec, a 25-year homeowner resident of the Gardens. A Teamster who works out of a Maspeth warehouse, Grabec was recently elected head of his court association. "I almost moved out a few years ago," he said. "It would have been a mistake."

"We've been mindful of the prob-

lem of gentrification," insists Havlicek. "This is a community which wants and needs its older residents." The Conservancy, he said, was looking at ways to create reverse equity mortgages for older homeowners and has lined up a "House Doctor" program to aid elderly owners who can't keep up their homes themselves.

The organization has been a good deal less vigorous in coping with troubled multifamily apartment buildings. Two of the Gardens' eight complexes, the handsome and well-groomed Phipps Houses, and Carolin apartments near Queens Boulevard, which was one of the state's earliest co-ops, are both affordable though with long waiting lists.

But six other complexes are not so well off. All show signs of deterioration, and both Director Rappaport and Havlicek acknowledge that tenants there are not well served. Two of the historical apartment houses on Skillman Avenue are owned by Michael Savino, a landlord whose poor management has earned him a reputation across the borough. Still, no community pressure, from the Conservancy or elsewhere, has been brought to bear. Like most block associations, the Conservancy so far appears to have put homeowners concerns far above the needs of tenants.

### Competing Visions

On the wall of the Safarazza and Greenly gourmet shop is an old framed photo of an earlier Skillman Avenue coffee bar, a lunch counter that used to be up the block where, in the '30s, the Gardens' militants would congregate to eat and talk. There's a laundromat there now, but part of the message the new shop seeks to send is that here, too, is a place for neighbors to gather.

"There are a lot of competing visions of what this community could become," admits Havlicek. "But we're not highbrow preservationists. I don't care if it takes ten years or twenty years for the fences to come down. What's more important is that we establish a sense of community."

And if only those who never eat quiche cast the first stones, the latest effort to build the democratic community envisioned by Sunnyside Gardens' planners might just achieve that unity. □

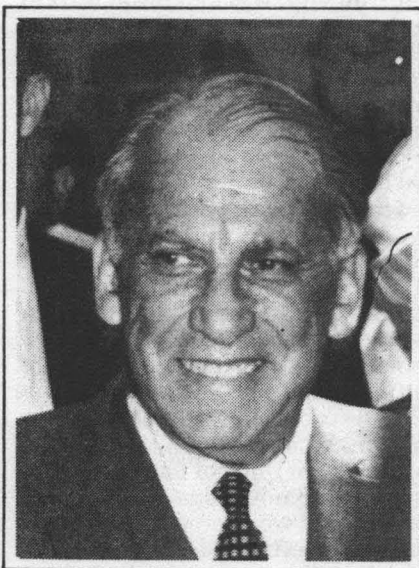


Streetcorner in the Gardens.  
Two names for one street.

Beth Rosenthal

## REVIEWS

## Fifty Years of Housing Advocacy



N.Y.C. Housing Authority

**Ira S. Robbins.**  
Housing was the "pivot and purpose" of his life.

**REMINISCENCES OF A HOUSING ADVOCATE** by Ira S. Robbins with Gus Tyler, Citizens Housing and Planning Council of New York, 20 W. 40 St., NY, NY 10018, 1984, 147 Pages, \$7.50, Paperbound.

#### BY WILLIAM A. PRICE

THIS BOOK IS AN AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL record of a man who described himself as "an advocate of public housing," a movement that for fifty years "became the pivot and purpose" of his life.

The germ of the idea for public housing, Robbins recalls, came from Mary Kingsbury Simkhovitch, "a towering figure in the settlement house movement," who pulled Robbins aside one day in 1931 after a meeting at United Neighborhood Houses and told him: "We ought to do what they did in Vienna."

The Vienna model was one produced by Austrian socialists who, Robbins adds, "had shown in Vienna how an imaginative program could not only replace slums with sturdy and whole-

some homes but revive the spirit of a creative community." Robbins' first active role in housing was as counsel for the Public Housing Conference of 1931 which Simkhovitch pulled together "in the depths of the great depression with some 30 percent of the labor force unemployed."

"Because people wanted a change and the private sector was helpless," Robbins says, "they looked to government to do what had to be done." The next year, in 1932, Franklin Delano Roosevelt was swept into office and reminded the country that "one third of the nation" is "ill-fed, ill-clothed, and ill-housed."

#### Public Housing's Controversy

From the very beginning, the public housing program was enshrined in controversy, much of which still inflicts it today. Robbins recalls that even New York State Governor Herbert H. Lehman, who replaced Roosevelt in the governor's mansion, "a man of generous impulses," nonetheless found it difficult "to accept what was then the radical proposal of public housing." The Vienna model was "tinted red." "The notion that public money should rush in where private money had always supplied the funding appeared unnecessary and perhaps even un-American," he wrote.

Fifty-four years later the same sounds are coming out of the White House in Washington. In the half-century which roughly parallels Robbins' tenure as a public housing activist, there are many lessons to be learned from the struggle of innumerable people — of whom Robbins was an example — who strove against and overcame political constraints and the hostility of entrenched economic power. He was also, as Simeon Golar, a former chairman of the New York Housing Authority (of which Robbins was a member for twelve years), says in "An Appreciation" at the end of this slender volume, "Ira bought and gave to us hyacinths for the soul." Golar added: "His proper memorial will be in the budding of flowers in springtime and in the contented smile of the elderly taking the sun, and in the

happy laughter of children at play." What a contrast to the customary images of public housing even among those who nominally support it.

There is hardly an aspect of urban struggle or community development that is not dealt with — one way or another — in this book. For matters that we take for granted now, it was not so back then. One of the early struggles was for the right of a municipal government to use the power of eminent domain to take over privately-owned property for the purpose of creating public housing. That fight centered on two tenement buildings on East Third Street in Manhattan's Lower East Side whose owner refused to sell to the New York City Housing Authority which was trying to assemble a block-long property that it could renovate into decent shelter for low income workers. The Housing Authority eventually won that fight and First Houses, as the resultant complex came to be known, is still providing — after half a century — decent housing to its tenants.

#### Racism's Omnipresence

There were many broader social issues that plague our society involved in the public housing fight. Preeminent among these was the issue of public ownership of housing which invaded the "rights" of private property. And insinuating itself one way or another into almost every fight was the endemic racism of our society. Robbins devotes a full chapter to just one such fight, the struggle to admit blacks to the huge Metropolitan Life Insurance Company development of Stuyvesant Town.

There are many other such examples; one of these being the fight in Forest Hills, Queens, against a Housing Authority "scatter site" development in which a predominantly white community organized against "an attempted murder of the middle class" as one picket line sign proclaimed and whose leader claimed: "They're transplanting a malignant tumor to a healthy, viable community."

This experience, Robbins recalls, took place at a time when the black demand for community control "had gained great momentum."

The lesson that Robbins learned was: "Community participation and community control are two different



things. In my judgment, communities should not have the veto power where large issues of public policy are at stake. Those responsible for the overall welfare of the city must have the final say." This may not be a popular opinion today among neighborhood activists. But it's a point of view that should be heard.

Robbins spent ten years as the executive vice president of the Citizens Housing and Planning Council. He was succeeded at that position by Roger Starr, later to be the top housing administrator of the City of New York as head of the Housing Development Administration (HDA), a man who was to emerge as the author of the concept of "planned shrinkage," and who is currently on the editorial staff of the *New York Times*.

Whatever one wants to make of Starr's progression, it was not at all the progress of Ira Robbins' life. Yet when

the Citizens Housing and Planning Council of New York published these reminiscences of Ira Robbins, it encompassed Robbins front and back with a long introduction by Starr and an end-piece epilogue also by Starr. And if one were to ask "Where's the beef?" the answer would be in the 128 pages of this volume by Robbins, not in Starr's attempt to put it all out of focus—fore and aft.

An example of Starr's distortion by interpretation is Starr's concept that the public housing struggle was one mounted only by the "reformers." Granted that Simkhovitch and Robbins themselves might be characterized as reformers, could not the housing activists of today (all of us) be also defined thusly? Nonetheless, the emphasis that Robbins himself put on the events of the day—the unemployment movement, among others—the objective conditions that is, provide a more

helpful background to viewing the history of public housing than the idea that the movement was only one of so-called reformers and had all the weaknesses of diletantism.

Roger Starr in his introduction says that, "the silence of the poor is more eloquent than their speech." This was written years after the inarticulate sit-ins, demonstrations and marches of the 1960s provoked the "reformers" in Washington to pass civil rights legislation. As anyone who has ever negotiated with Roger Starr can recall, it may be true that the "silence" of the poor is less eloquent to him than the language of funding proposals or of the *New York Times Style Book*.

But in reading this book, go for "the beef" which is there in abundance. Don't let Starr cage you in. □

*William A. Price is a community activist on Manhattan's West Side.*

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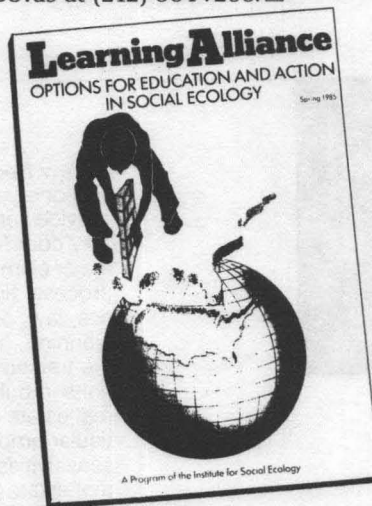
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## RESOURCES/EVENTS

☞ **THE LEARNING ALLIANCE:** A new cooperatively run self-help network, has a long listing of courses for this spring. The Alliance is a project of Goddard College's Institute for Social Ecology and focuses on the study of human and natural ecosystems. Courses integrate social and environmental issues in community organizing. Offerings will include the following: Redesigning Our Cities, taught by Kimberly Schwab and David Levine, both urban greening activists; Community Land Acquisition, led by Steve Schwartz of the Trust for Public Land; Reclaiming Vacant Lots with Adam Purple whose Lower East Side garden is legend; The Environment in New York City, led by Students for Environmental Awareness of NYU; Who will Feed N.Y. in the Year 2000?, led by David Yarrow, founder of an organic farmers group; Window Box Construction, taught by carpenter and designer Alex Ewen; Alternative Energy and Self Empowerment, with Charles Ewing, John Burke and Ken Jason of the group Solar Energy Awareness and Demonstration Seminars; Women and Community Development, led by Jan Pederson of the National Congress of Neighborhood Women; The Decline and Fall of the NYC Subway, with a member of the Straphangers Campaign; Community Organizing with Computers taught by Bob Townley, a social worker and urban planner; The Community Mural Movement, led by Kathleen Zaborowski Gupta, director of Cityarts and Creating and Designing Community Murals with Vivian Jimenez Linares also of Cityarts; and How to Take Over and Own Your Own Building, led by Linda Cohen, director of the Ownership Transfer Project at the Community Service Society.

Most courses are one-time sessions three or four hours long and are offered more than one date. They begin in March and go through June. Course costs vary from \$5 to \$75 with several offered gratis. For a full brochure listing, contact the Learning Alliance at (212) 675-5911. ☐

☞ **BUCKS FOR BRICKS:** A symposium on the new state Banking Department Real Estate Equity Regulation is being sponsored March 12 by the Community Training and Resource Center with the city's Commission on Human Rights. It will examine the effects of the Omnibus Banking Bill and community groups access to development capital. Vincent Tese, head of the state Banking Department, will give a presentation on the new regulation and how the state will monitor it. Other sessions will address the Qualifying Community Investment requirement and how to use funds generated by it for local housing and development needs. The event is at NY University Loeb Student Center, Auditorium, from 9:30 a.m.-2:30 p.m. and costs \$5. For information and to register, contact CTCRC, 198 Broadway, New York, NY 10038; or call Elaine Dovas at (212) 964-7200. ☐



☞ **CRIME CONFERENCE:** The third annual Governor's Conference on Crime Prevention is scheduled for April 9-11 in Albany. John Walsh of the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children heads a group of speakers who will address such topics as crime prevention for the elderly, rape prevention, security systems and crime analysis. The fee is \$105 and includes all seminars, materials, two luncheons and a banquet. For registration information contact NYS Division of Criminal Justice Services, Office of Crime Prevention, Executive Park Tower, Stuyvesant Plaza, Albany, NY 12203. ☐

☞ **NEWSLETTER WORKSHOP:** Cornell Cooperative Extension will offer a four-hour workshop on writing and producing newsletters for community groups. The course will be held March 23 from 9 a.m.-1 p.m. and will cover reporting, writing, editing, advertising, layout and production. The fee is \$7.50. To register contact Housing Program, Cornell Cooperative Extension, 15 E. 26th St., New York, NY 10010; (212) 340-2939. ☐

☞ **PEACE AND JUSTICE:** The Riverside Church Disarmament Program is holding a spring conference, "And Economic Justice for All," March 22-23 with workshops and speakers on national and foreign policy issues, such as plant closings, the social costs of the "star wars" defense plan, women and poverty and the Bishop's pastoral letter. Speakers include Ruth Messenger, Rep. Ron Dellums, Betty Lall and Rev. William Sloan Coffin. The cost is \$25; \$20 for low income, students and seniors. For information or to register contact the Disarmament Program, 490 Riverside Dr., NY, NY 10027 (212) 222-5900 ext 238. ☐

☞ **SHARED HOUSING:** The state's Shared Housing Option Program will present five workshops on shared housing to identify new state laws, federal initiatives and encourage new shared housing programs. The first session will be at Booth Memorial Hospital, and hosted by Pomonok Neighborhood Center on April 8. There is a \$15 fee. Other sessions will be held throughout the state. For more information contact Howard Kimmel, Director, DHCR-SHOP, 58th Floor, Two World Trade Center, New York, NY 10047; (212) 488-3228. ☐

☞ **HEARING ON HOUSING:** A public hearing on housing and homelessness will be held March 14 from 11 a.m.-5 p.m. at Hunter College Social Work School, 129 E. 79th St. at Lexington Avenue. Sponsored by the Eastside Service Providers Coalition, the hearing will bring together tenants and activists to give testimony on the housing crisis. To pre-register for speaking or for information, call (212) 689-6233. ☐



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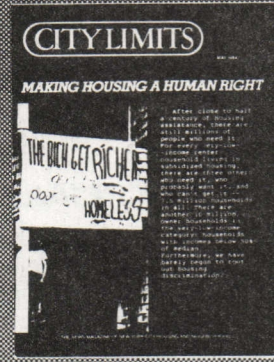
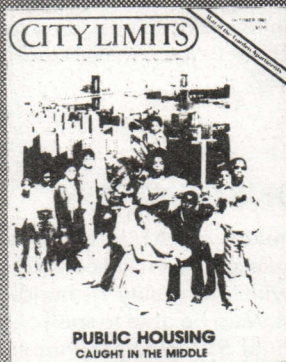
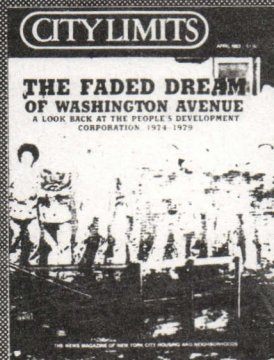
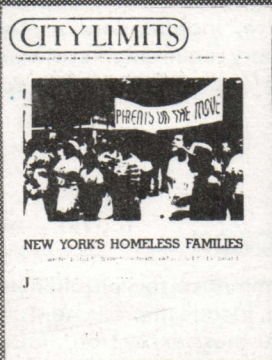
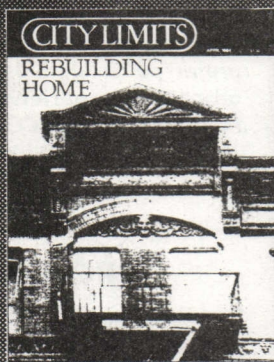
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