

NEW REPORT: OVER 4,000 VACANT LUXURY UNITS IN SIX NYC NEIGHBORHOODS; 138 EMPTY RESIDENTIAL CONDOS OWE CITY \$3.8 MILLION IN BACK TAXES

Low-Income NY'ers & Elected Officials Call on City to Convert Condos in Low-Income Areas into Affordable Housing, Including Using Tax Foreclosure

Harlem— Six primarily low-income neighborhoods across the city are home to 4,092 empty housing units, on the market for an average of nearly \$2 million, as New York City continues to face record homelessness and increasingly unavailable low-income housing, according to new data released today by Right to the City-NYC (RTTC-NYC). The report, [*People without Homes, & Homes without People*](#), follows RTTC-NYC's fall count of vacant condos in these six neighborhoods.

The luxury units, in both completely and partially vacant buildings, include 138 condo buildings that collectively owe \$3.8 million to the city in back taxes for being more than one year delinquent on property, water, or sewer taxes. RTTC-NYC— a coalition of community organizations—joined with elected officials today to call on the City to acquire the tax delinquent buildings through tax foreclosure and convert vacant units into permanently affordable housing for low-income New Yorkers.

“Luxury buildings are sitting empty in the middle of neighborhoods impacted by the recession and high rates of homelessness. These same buildings are costing the city millions in missing tax revenue. This is no brainer— New York City shouldn't stand for vacant housing when so many people in those same communities are in need of a place to live,” said **David Dodge, the Right to the City Coordinator** and one of the primary researchers on the project.

In addition to the proposal for buildings in tax arrears, RTTC-NYC's report includes other recommendations for creating affordable housing from empty condo units including: converting units into public housing or community land trusts and seizing vacant condos by eminent domain.

RTTC-NYC is additionally recommending suspending development tax breaks to developers and imposing fees on owners of buildings who warehouse their units for more than a year. The Coalition is encouraging the City Council to pass legislation— Housing Not Warehousing (Intro 48)—to require an annual, citywide count of vacant properties in New York City. The legislation, introduced by Council Member Melissa Mark Viverito, currently has 28 co-sponsors.

“These empty condos were built right here in our neighborhoods— and now they help their neighbors: by becoming permanent low income housing,” said **Lorraine Knox, a member of Community Voices Heard and RTTC-NYC**.

In an effort spearheaded by City Council Speaker Christine Quinn, the City has allocated \$20 million the Housing Preservation and Development's Housing Asset Renewal program (HARP) to convert condos into moderate-income housing, but no housing has yet been converted.

“I became homeless in 2008 because I couldn't afford housing,” said **Arvanetta Henry, a member of Picture the Homeless and RTTC-NYC**. “My landlord decided to raise our rents to \$2,100, which I couldn't afford. If this happened to me it can happen to anyone. It makes me sick to see all this empty housing when there are thousands of people in NYC who need somewhere to live.”

The report details vacant luxury condos and stalled construction in 245 census tracts within 9 community districts, canvassed last fall by 150 members and allies of RTTC-NYC, in: Downtown Brooklyn, Bushwick, the Lower East Side, Harlem, the West Village and Chelsea, and the South Bronx, where coalition member organizations actively work. Research support for the report was provided by the **Urban Justice Center’s Community Development Project**.

RTTC-NYC identified empty units and buildings in tax arrears in six neighborhoods:

	Empty Units	Buildings in Tax Arrears	Total Taxes Owed as of 2/5/10
• Downtown Brooklyn (CD 202):	829	26	\$1,015,677
• Lower East Side (CD 303):	1,187	29	\$1,978,304
• Harlem (CDs 310, 311):	1,009	33	\$838,080
• Bushwick (CD 204):	280	26	\$92,433
• South Bronx (CDs 101, 102):	71	12	\$422,383
• W. Village/Chelsea (CDs 302, 304, 305):	715	12	\$350,813

Speakers cited the rapid development of luxury condominiums over the last several years— many in neighborhoods where low-income people live — and while, at the same time, the number of units affordable for low-income families has decreased precipitously.

Elected officials— including **Council members Melissa Mark Viverito, Leticia James and Brad Lander**— noted the need for bold government action to convert vacant condos in New York City.

“Thanks to the hard work of the Right to the City members for shining a light on the problem of the many vacant, abandoned, and half-completed buildings leftover from the boom that litter our city,” said **Council Member Brad Lander from Brooklyn**. “In a city where a record number of families are going homeless every night, this report shows us that there is an opportunity to turn some of these problematic buildings into real community benefits.”

“I was born and bred in the South Bronx, and I love my neighborhood— it’s an important community for working class people,” said **Cerita Parker, Member of Mothers on the Move**. “But recently, all these luxury stores and condominiums have been built in our community. Who are they for? I can’t live in these buildings, and I can’t shop in these stores.”

Right to the City-NYC is an alliance of grassroots, primarily membership-based organizations working in low-income, immigrant and other communities of color in New York City. Developing vacant condos into affordable housing is one of thirty-three demands included in their 2009 policy platform, prioritized because of the impact gentrification is having on low-income communities and because of the immediate impact this policy would have in improving the lives of low income people.

The full report is available on request or online here:

[http://urbanjustice.org/pdf/publications/People Without Homes and Homes Without People.pdf](http://urbanjustice.org/pdf/publications/People_Without_Homes_and_Homes_Without_People.pdf)

Right to the City-NYC includes: CAAAV/Chinatown Tenants Union; Center for Social Inclusion; Community Development Project, Urban Justice Center; Community Voices Heard (CVH); FIERCE; Families United for Racial and Economic Equality (FUREE); Jews for Racial and Economic Justice (JFREJ); Make the Road New York; Mothers on the Move (MOM); NYC Aids Housing Network/V.O.C.A.L. NY-Users Union (NYCAHN/VOCAL); Picture the Homeless; Red Hook Initiative.