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Brooklyn gets affordable housing boost

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A complex the size of a city block with more than 300 affordable high-rise apartments and townhouses will be built near the Brooklyn Navy Yard in Fort Greene, the city has announced.

The development, part of the mayor's plan to create 165,000 affordable units to help stave off a looming housing crisis, will be built on the site of a former prison.

The project is part of a plan to create thousands of units on unconventional sites, like Sunnyside Yards in Queens and over the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway in Brooklyn.

Advocates applauded the move because of the high demand for housing and the one million new New York residents expected by 2030.

"We're working on trying to prevent displacement," said Deb Howard, executive director of the Pratt Area Community Council, which helped develop the 103,000-square-foot Brig site.

About 77 percent of the 434 residential units at the Brig site will be for families of four with a household income of \$21,250 to \$92,170, or \$14,900 to \$64,480 for single-person households. The complex will also include open space as well as room for businesses and community centers.

Mayor Michael Bloomberg's PlaNYC housing plan ideas "go far toward supplying the property that it didn't seem he had a year ago," said Julia Vitullo-Martin, a senior fellow at the Manhattan Institute.

She called the administration "imaginative" when it comes finding housing solutions.

But Vitullo-Martin sees two drawbacks to the mayor's housing initiative. The first is the focus on building on more expensive land -- like the Greenpoint-Williamsburg waterfront -- rather than cheaper locations, such as East New York.

Additionally, the city is dependent on "inclusionary zoning," in which market rate homes are counted on as subsidies for affordable units.

"That may not be a long-term strategy," Vitullo-Martin said.

Citywide, the number of existing affordable rental units dropped between 2002 and 2005, according to the Furman Center for Real Estate and Urban Policy at New York University. Those costing less than \$600 a month dropped by 11 percent, while those costing between \$600 and \$799 fell by nearly 18 percent.



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"You know, there's never going to be enough," Vitullo-Martin said. "Demand is going to increase beyond supply into the foreseeable future. That's our new reality."

The cost of Bloomberg's 10-year affordable housing plan, the largest municipal plan in the nation's history, is \$7.5 billion in city, state, and federal funding, as well as housing development corporation bonds, said Neill Coleman, assistant communications commissioner at the city's Department of Housing Preservation and Development. As of last month, 55,000 units had been financed and 40,000 completed.

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