



# HOUSING BROOKLYN:

A ROAD MAP  
TO REAL  
AFFORDABILITY  
FOR  
BROOKLYNITES



Eric L. Adams  
Brooklyn Borough President

# INTRODUCTION

Government can – and must – play a critical role in supporting the infrastructure for an urban center’s quality of life. Nowhere is that more apparent than in a city like New York and on an issue like affordable housing.

Mayor Bill de Blasio’s ten-year plan to build and preserve 200,000 units of affordable housing across the City reflects both the opportunity and intention of his administration to advance best practices in order to solve the affordable housing crisis that is unique to NYC, and as the Brooklyn-born mayor well knows, you can’t do it without Kings County.

Brooklyn could easily be the pilot program for the challenges and opportunities of creating and preserving affordable housing in a large urban environment. Our population continues to grow with the rise of savvy newcomers who want to live here, baby boomers who want to retire here, seniors who are living longer and gathering in naturally-occurring retirement centers (NORCs); not to mention the flurry of businesses – from one-person startups to light manufacturing to national chains – who want to grow their businesses here and eventually bring employees and staff who also want to live nearby. It’s a good “problem” to have but also one that requires nuanced study of how government can best build and preserve, develop and maintain unique character, welcome newcomers and support those without whose labor Brooklyn would not be what it is today.

Creating and maintaining affordable housing is a central issue on the Brooklyn Borough President’s agenda and the solutions that are proposed in the following report are aligned with and can help achieve the mayor’s development goals.

Our proposed solutions can be broken down roughly into three broad categories:

**I. Identify existing sites and underdeveloped land for new affordable housing**

**II. Advance changes to the zoning map and text and real estate tax laws to encourage affordable housing development**

**III. Maintain affordable housing forever**

Finally, we also offer steps that local government, community partners and stakeholders can take to:

**IV. Connect New Yorkers to affordable housing**

New York City, in general, and Brooklyn, in particular, can be models for government at its best: expanding opportunity and safeguarding community character, while being supportive, resilient and progressive. Brooklyn has the space to create entirely new neighborhoods by tapping underdeveloped land, exploring air rights and considering developing residential properties over existing rail yards and rail infrastructure. We have the capacity; all we need is tenacity!

The borough president is committed to building that model and welcomes the opportunity to work with the Mayor’s Office, the Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD), Department of City Planning (DCP), New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA), City Council and other local legislators, Empire State Development Corporation (ESDC), Community Boards, faith-based institutions, nonprofits and other service organizations and, of course, our One Brooklyn community. Let’s get to work!

## IDENTIFY EXISTING SITES AND UNDERDEVELOPED LAND

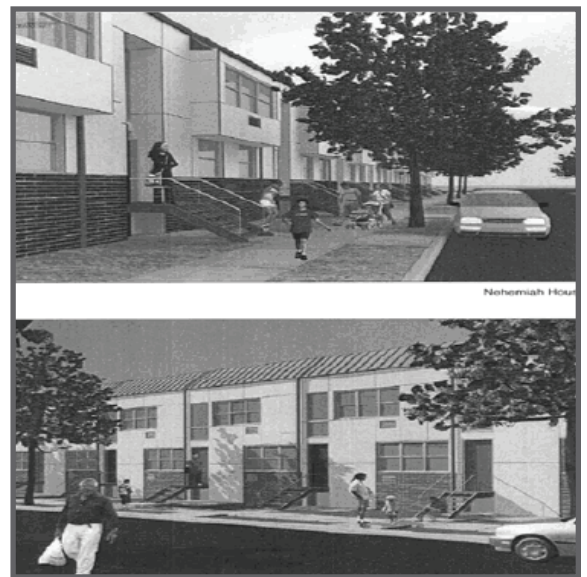
Although affordable housing is in critical shortage throughout the borough, Brooklyn has many potential development sites. Following are specific sites and recommended actions that could advance affordable housing development in Brooklyn.



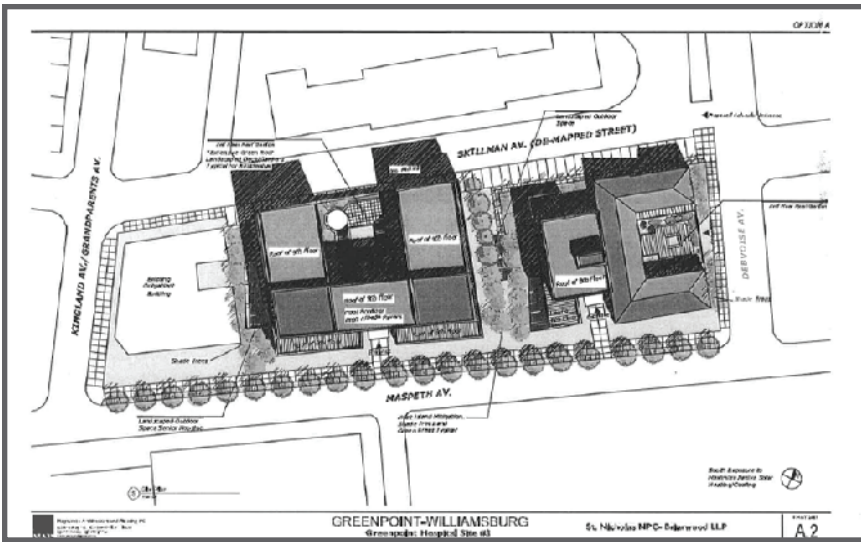
**Livonia Avenue Corridor:** HPD should issue a Request for Proposal (RFP) for the remaining sites it owns along Livonia Avenue in CB16.



**Fulton Street Corridor:** HPD should issue an RFP for the sites it owns along Fulton Street in the eastern section of Bedford-Stuyvesant extending to Ocean Hill.



**Gateway Estates:** The City should build out the remainder of sites along Elton Street as well as vacant land and streets to achieve the nearly 2,200 housing units anticipated with the completion of Gateway Estates. The City should also work with the Empire State Development Corporation to develop state land that is expected to be available along Fountain Avenue.

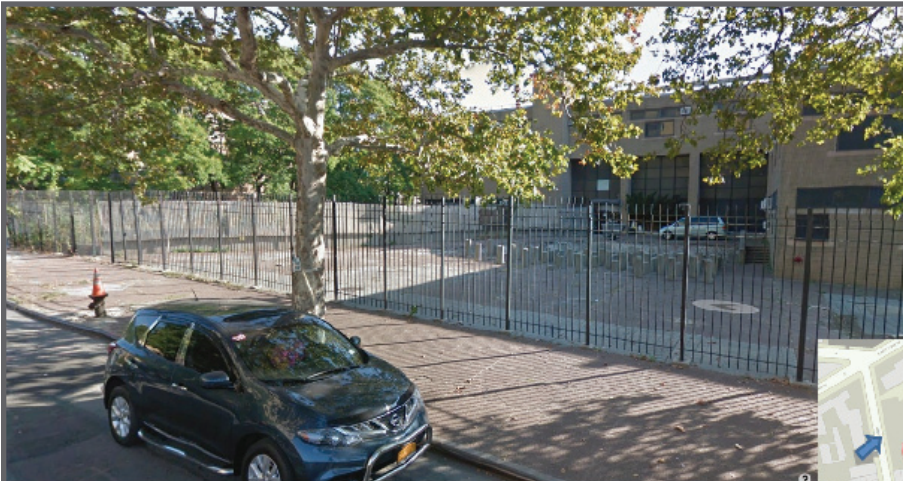


**Greenpoint Hospital:** Assist St. Nicks Alliance – which wants to develop a 250-unit housing development with a substantial senior housing component – to access the old Greenpoint Hospital site by reopening the HPD process for disposition of the property.

**Public Place (Gowanus Green):** Expedite land use actions and environmental review so that the selected developer can move forward on construction of 700 mixed-income units of housing. Include the Fifth Avenue Committee in these discussions.



**Broadway Triangle:** Six-hundred potential units of affordable housing could be built if HPD used “urban renewal acquisition” to develop available sites in this area. The City should also seek “permanent affordability” by extending preference to locally-based nonprofits in the boundaries of the entire zip code.



- Site uses only 21% of available floor area based on C4-3 zoning
- 72% of floor area can be used for residential use based on R6 zoning

**Brownsville Community Justice Center:**

In consultation with Community Board 16, the City should transfer a section of the open area along Amboy Street to HPD so that an RFP for the unused residential floor area can be issued. This would maximize floor area to create permanent affordable housing.



**Coney Island:** Coney Island has significant potential for future housing development. The City should expedite construction of new sewers to allow for future high density development – projected at 4,500 housing units with 35 percent to be affordable – to proceed. The City should also acquire the HRA-tenanted building on West 21st Street and issue a series of RFPs to complete construction in Coney North and Coney East.

**BRIGHTON BEACH MUNICIPAL PARKING LOT**

- Block 8887; Lots 20, 50
- Lot area: 93,840 SF (460\*204)
- Zoning: R7-1 (3.44 FAR)
- 312 parking spaces

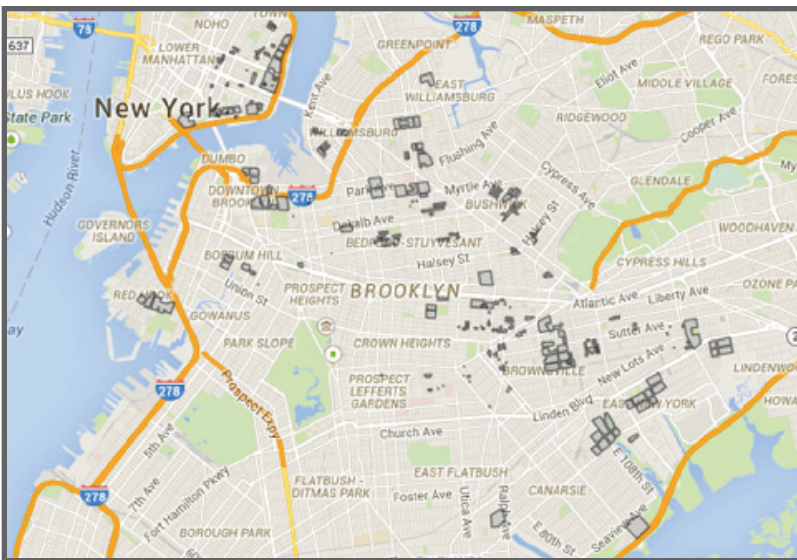



Looking from parking lot towards Brightonwater CT

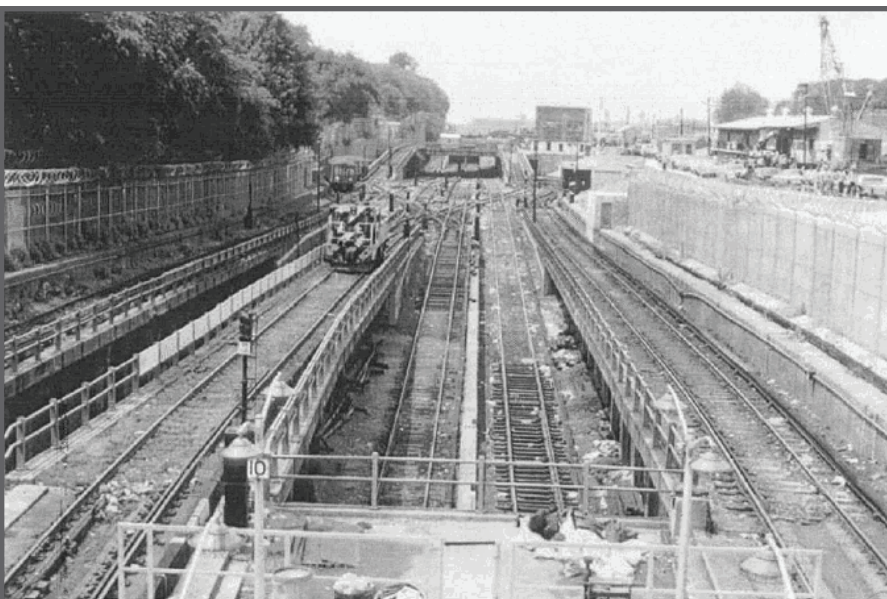
**City-Owned Municipal Parking Lots:** The City should consider selling existing municipal lots in Brighton Beach, Canarsie, Bensonhurst, East New York, Flatbush, Midwood and Sheepshead Bay in order to build approximately 2,000 affordable housing units while incorporating shared public parking as part of the redevelopment.



**Brooklyn Army Terminal:** Renovate the Second Avenue section of the parking lot at the Brooklyn Army Terminal and allow for development to be built above the lot, potentially creating 700 units of affordable housing. This is an excellent area for housing given existing Manhattan ferry service at this location, nearby connections to bus and subway service, and access to businesses that operate in the Brooklyn Army Terminal building.



**NYCHA campuses:** From rethinking parking lots and the location of play areas and green spaces, to building above by accessing air rights, NYCHA properties represent a great opportunity for developing affordable housing. We should explore using these development's rights in consultation with community stakeholders, community boards and local elected officials.



**Rail yards and railways:** Entirely new neighborhoods with thousands of affordable housing units could be built over some of Brooklyn's vast corridors of rail yards and railways.

# ADVANCE CHANGES TO ZONING TEXT AND MAPS AND REFORM REAL ESTATE TAX LAW

The **37th Street and 62nd Street corridors** and the **Coney Island yards** are prime examples of areas that should be considered for decking. As the population of southern Brooklyn continues to grow, especially in Sunset Park, South Slope, Borough Park and Bensonhurst, developing over the **rail infrastructure along the D and N train corridors** could produce significant numbers of housing units, with a large share of affordable units. Additionally, the **Coney Island Rail Depot**, covering nearly 75 acres, could produce thousands of additional affordable housing units.

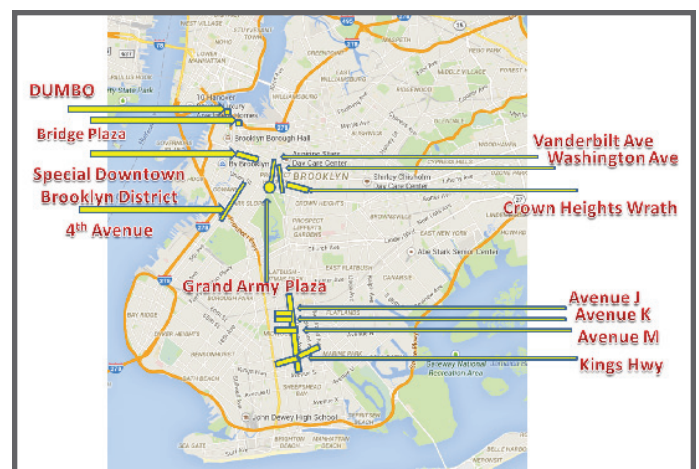


**Williamsburg Bridge Plaza:** Allow for development to be built above the bus depot to potentially create 200 units of affordable housing. This is an excellent area for housing given the multiple bus service options available as well as nearby subway service. It also benefits from being along the Broadway retail corridor and would serve as the western edge of the Broadway development corridor.

**Faith-based Institutions:** Brooklyn is a borough of churches, temples, synagogues and mosques. And many of our houses of worship have development rights that could be advanced to realize their social visions, which are often synonymous with creating affordable housing. Government agencies and local elected officials should work alongside leaders of faith-based institutions to provide the financial and technical expertise to make best use of these untapped development rights.

As New York City continues its role as a model of modern urban development, City government should maximize the power it has to revise zoning and taxation laws to incentivize developers to create affordable housing units.

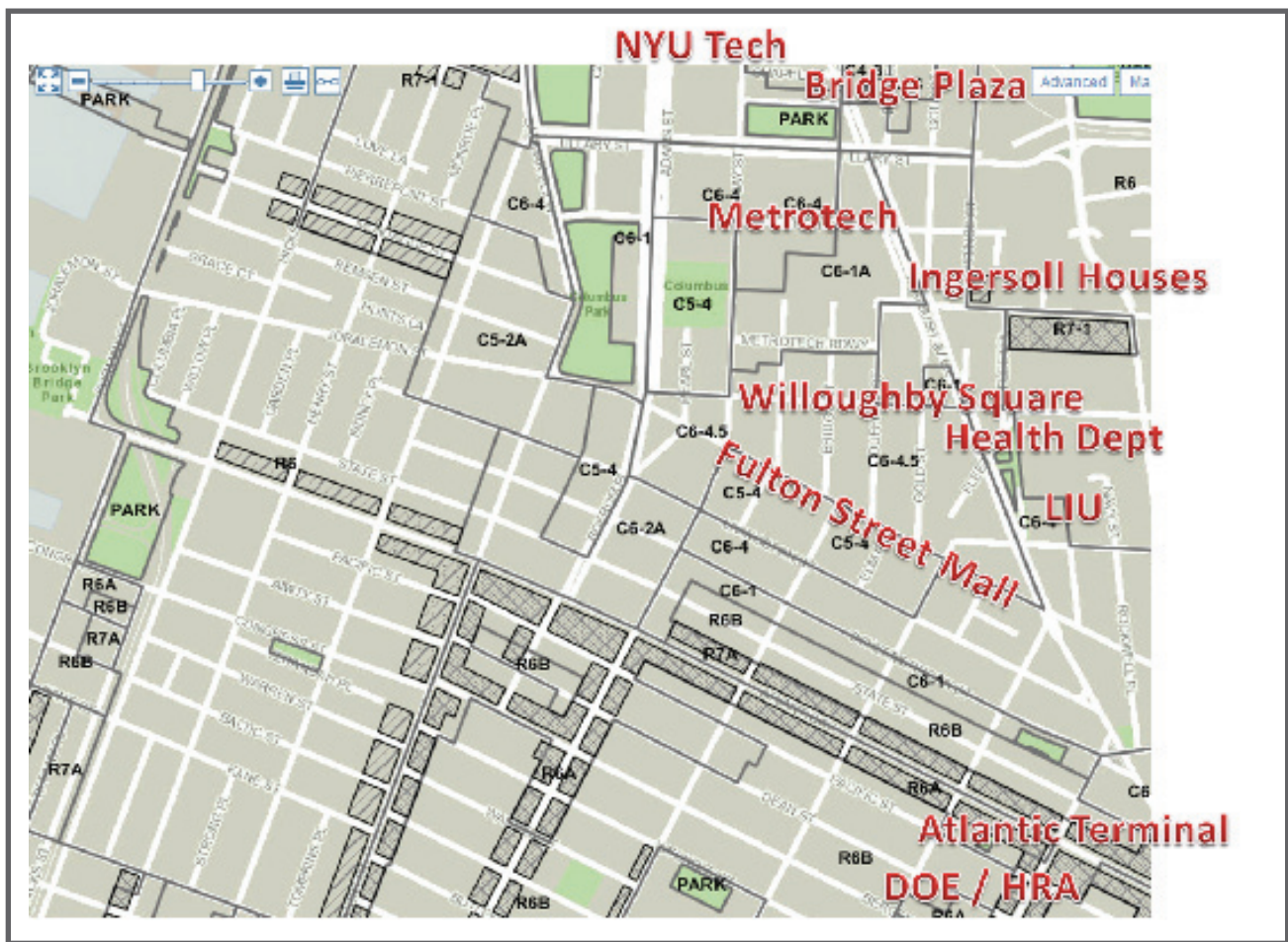
**Voluntary Inclusionary Zoning Program:** When developers voluntarily include affordable housing units in their projects, they can receive tax abatements or other incentives. Allowing for increased height – which has a financial advantage to developers because of additional units on upper floors – can be leveraged to induce them to include affordable housing units in the project. The City should revisit the Voluntary Inclusionary Zoning rules to link maximum height use of the floor area bonus to participation in the Voluntary Inclusionary Zoning program.



The City should also establish additional **Voluntary Inclusionary Zoning within areas that were previously “upzoned.”** This would simply ensure that developers have a definitive financial incentive to take advantage of the 421-a tax abatement program, thereby ensuring the inclusion of affordable units in their projects. (Developers have been forgoing the tax abatement since the 421-a rules reduce market rate unit floor areas to 80 percent). The City should

revisit recent up-zonings – such as **DUMBO**, **Brooklyn Bridge Plaza**, various blocks in **Downtown Brooklyn** not designated R10 or an equivalent zoning district, **Park Slope’s Fourth Avenue**, sections of **Washington and/or Vanderbilt Avenues** in Prospect Heights, Kings Highway and **certain avenues in Midwood and Homecrest** – that were overlooked as opportunities for designation as Voluntary Inclusionary Housing Zoning Districts.

**Leverage the 50 percent reduction in required parking in the Special Downtown Brooklyn District:** By conditioning the parking requirement reduction on participation in the Inclusionary Housing Zoning Resolution’s floor area incentive program, the City can exert powerful leverage to assure the development of affordable housing in Downtown Brooklyn. The City should revisit the parking requirements in Downtown Brooklyn so that developers who make use of the reduction in the parking requirements are also required to use the affordable housing bonus.



**Further reduction or elimination of required parking for affordable housing units:** Right-sizing parking requirements to the rate of projected utilization for affordable housing units in transit-rich neighborhoods needs consideration. Often the cost of providing such required parking hinders the economic feasibility of including affordable housing in developments. The Department of City Planning is currently undertaking a study that will see if parking requirements can be reduced, or even eliminated for affordable housing units. I look forward to reviewing this study to see if parking reforms can be implemented as a way to support increased affordable housing in the borough.



**Revisit the provisions of 421-a Real Estate Property Law of New York State** Ensuring that the 421-a Real Estate Property Tax Law is more consistent with the Inclusionary Zoning Resolution floor area incentive will help ensure that providing affordable housing units is more attractive to developers, creating more units in the process.

### **Specific Zoning Changes in Key Development Areas**

In addition to incentives for developers, changes to the zoning map can help achieve the City's affordable housing goals. Zoning that permits more residential density, revises manufacturing and automotive districts and transforms low-rise commercial use to medium-density contextually developed housing, as well as other changes, should be explored. This should be part of the Mayor's mandatory affordable housing initiative and part of neighborhood preservation-based rezoning initiatives along areas such as the:

Broadway corridor—sustainable East New York corridors—Gowanus' Fourth Avenue—Sunset Park's Eighth Avenue—Empire Boulevard (as part of a preservation-based rezoning of Crown Heights)—Atlantic Avenue corridor (Bed-Stuyvesant and Crown Heights)—Nstrand Avenue (Brooklyn Junction to Kings Highway)—McGuinness Boulevard and sections south of the Navy Yard.

## MAINTAIN AFFORDABLE HOUSING FOREVER

Along with creating new units, maintaining permanent affordable housing units must be an integral part of the city-wide initiative. The City should work to minimize the loss of affordable housing by requiring that such units remain affordable in perpetuity. Typically, rental unit developments remain as affordable housing for 30-50 years, depending on the financing obligations. Once the financing term ends, these units can be converted to market rate. Ownership unit developments provide even fewer years of affordability before becoming market-rate housing. Once sold, these units are no longer subsidized as purchasers pay whatever the market demands.

Given the scarcity of government-owned land, the time is right for HPD to adopt a policy of "affordable

forever." Otherwise, the accomplishments of today are lost before future generations get to share in the benefit of housing affordability.

"Permanent affordability" would help address these issues. For rental developments, the voluntary inclusionary housing zoning regulation is an effective tool. Unfortunately, much of the affordable housing being developed is not in accordance with that zoning incentive so having properties in the hands of non-profits is a more effective method to promote permanent affordability. Selling City property to non-profit affordable housing developers provides a "soft" guarantee that the non-inclusionary units will remain affordable for the lifetime of the non-profit, since the mission of many nonprofits includes a commitment to affordable housing. Where that is not feasible, the City – in its final negotiations – should retain the ongoing right to provide subsequent financing to reinvest in building systems with a continued obligation that units remain affordable.

Finally, houses, co-ops, and condominiums—HPD should use its land disposition agreement as a mechanism to ensure a resale of the unit to a household with similar family income. Original purchasers would not need to reimburse the City for the subsidies and lien on the land. These subsidies would stay with the property forever.

## CONNECT NEW YORKERS TO AFFORDABLE HOUSING

### **Partner with HPD**

To truly realize the impact of the city's ambitious housing plan, we must also make sure that city residents are able to qualify for housing opportunities that arise. Housing literacy is a critical component of this and must be addressed by partnering with HPD on efforts – including holding educational forums and fostering partnerships with community and faith-based organizations – as a way to ensure that residents are aware of and can fully reap the affordable housing benefits.

### **Multiple Tiers**

As we know, the definition of "affordable housing" in New York City covers a broad range of personal, fami-

ly, and financial circumstances. But current policy frustrates the goal of achieving true affordable housing because residents often earn too much or too little income compared to the income ranges typically made available for existing units. Housing should have multiple tiers of affordability to provide opportunities for low- and middle-income residents, thus allowing more people to apply for available units. Tiers should be further split to create more fairness so that someone with higher income qualifying for the same unit as someone with lower income does not have a significantly lower rental burden.

### **Local Preference**

“Local preference” prevents residents from being pushed out of their homes because of increasing housing costs. We should expand local preference practices and extend preference boundaries beyond the community district to improve local preference selection within high-need neighborhoods. Relying solely on community districts is problematic, as is evidenced by the Special Downtown District, where the 50 percent community preference cannot be met from residents within Community District 2. One solution is to use zip code boundaries as a supplemental boundary line when available affordable units are at or near the border of a community district. We should also extend the local preference support given to displaced residents and codify current HPD practice.

### **Exceptions to the 30 Percent Requirement**

Families who already pay too much rent for substandard housing are disqualified from the affordable housing lottery because they do not meet the minimum household earnings, even though they are paying in excess of the rent stated for the affordable apartment. The requirement to pay not more than 30 percent of household income hurts people who already live in substandard housing and pay more than 30 percent of their income toward housing. HPD should create exceptions in such situations so that those with financial housing burdens are eligible to live in newly-produced, quality affordable housing accommodations.

### **Seniors Raising Grandchildren**

As the City continues to build its affordable housing strategy, I want to call special attention to the needs of senior residents who are raising their grandchildren. Most traditional senior-specific housing does not allow residents to house and care for young people. I strongly urge HPD to consider replicating the success of existing housing projects for seniors who are raising children by issuing an RFP for a similar development site in Brooklyn. We should encourage, not penalize, caretakers who support other family members by providing stable, multi-generation households, which is exactly what our working class families need and can benefit from.

---

## **CONCLUSION**

Brooklynites are committed to identifying a way forward to make certain that anyone who wants to live, raise a family and work in the borough has an affordable place to call home.

This report will guide Administration officials by providing insight into potential locations to advance affordable housing sites in Brooklyn as well as the necessary policy and zoning reforms that would help secure additional resources and ensure that any affordable units brought on line become permanently affordable.

The recommendations made here are the beginning of a conversation that must continue in collaboration with local elected officials, community boards, neighborhood civic groups and other stakeholders to determine the best use of city-owned properties, the most effective way to implement policy and zoning reforms and the allocation of the needed Capital Budget appropriation and other financing mechanisms to achieve permanent affordability for Brooklynites. Brooklyn Borough Hall looks forward to continuing this dialogue and moving forward with an agreed upon agenda.