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## City Plans Middle Income Project On Queens Waterfront

City Plans Middle-Income Project on Queens Waterfront



Uli Seit for The New York Times

Land along the East River in Queens would be the site of up to 5,000 rental apartments for the middle class, under plans announced Thursday.

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By [DAMIEN CAVE](#)

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Mayor [Michael R. Bloomberg](#) announced plans yesterday to buy 24 acres of [Queens](#) waterfront property for a towering development, which would be the largest middle-income housing complex built in New York City in more than 30 years.

Under the proposal, the city would bring as many 5,000 new rental units to a largely industrial area of Long Island City, where chic restaurants are just beginning to appear amid low-slung factories and three-family homes.

The new apartments, Mr. Bloomberg said, would be for families of four earning between

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\$60,000 and \$145,000 a year, who would pay \$1,200 to \$2,500 a month in rent.

Though the ratio of middle-income apartments to market-rate units would depend on environmental studies and potential cleanup costs, city officials said they were hoping to make the entire complex affordable and to keep it that way for 40 years.

Not only will it give birth to a new community that's going to encourage new growth in Long Island City, and complement our efforts to revive the city's waterfront, Mr. Bloomberg said, it will also provide much needed housing for the real backbone of our city, our teachers, nurses, police officers.

The mayor emphasized that the deal in which the city purchased the land from the [Port Authority of New York and New Jersey](#) for about \$146 million was a smart investment that exemplified his administration's plan to build and preserve 165,000 units of lower-cost housing over 10 years.

The mayor compared the proposed complex to the most ambitious previous efforts to create middle-class housing in New York: Starrett City, which added 5,888 new units to Brooklyn in 1974, and Stuyvesant Town and Peter Cooper Village in Manhattan, a sprawling set of 110 brick towers with 11,232 apartments that has been a working-class haven for six decades.

Indeed, the sale of Stuyvesant Town and Peter Cooper Village, across the East River from the new site, seemed to hover over the deal announced yesterday.

On Tuesday, Metropolitan Life, the owner of the Manhattan complexes, agreed to sell the property for \$5.4 billion to a real estate firm, in a plan that could lead to the loss of many of the buildings' rent-regulated units over the next few decades. Even as tenants pulled together a bid with support from the City Council, the mayor stayed on the sidelines, drawing rebukes from housing activists who questioned his dedication to affordability.

Deputy Mayor [Daniel L. Doctoroff](#) had said it was a matter of efficient use of public dollars: preserving the historic units would have cost about \$107,000 per unit. In contrast, he said yesterday, the units in the new Queens development would be built for about \$54,000 each in city funds.

So we can get two units here for every one there, he said at the press conference announcing the deal, plus we get a major increase in the housing stock.

Mayor Bloomberg interjected, You must remember that a lot of the housing units in Stuyvesant and Peter Cooper Village are affordable and will stay affordable for many, many years.

He said the new development really is a net plus to the city. He said its location on the water, where it looks out on the [United Nations](#) and the Empire State Building, showed the city's determination to weave affordable housing into areas that might otherwise have become enclaves for the wealthy.

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This is as good a piece of property as you will find, Mr. Bloomberg said.

The city plans to complete the purchase within 90 days, develop a master plan for a mixed-use development including retail shops and parks, and then solicit bids from private builders, perhaps as early as next year.

Housing activists reacted mainly with praise, but also with measures of skepticism.

Some questioned the income limits, suggesting that they overshot the families in greatest need. But the larger issue seemed to be one of scope and emphasis.

Michael McKee, treasurer of the Tenants Political Action Committee, and Tom Waters, a housing analyst with the Community Service Society, repeated a longstanding complaint that new construction will never be enough to offset the loss of rental units that are rapidly moving from regulated to market rate.

A study in May by the Community Service Society found that between 1990 and 2005, nearly a quarter of the roughly 121,000 apartments built under federal and state subsidy programs dating from the 1960s and 70s left those programs. This year alone, by the authors count, New York City will lose more than 5,000 apartments for low- and middle-income families.

This is a blind spot on the part of the mayor and the administration, Mr. McKee said. They are stubbornly refusing to recognize that they are taking one step forward, three steps back.

Assemblyman Richard Brodsky, a Westchester Democrat who heads a committee of the State Legislature that oversees public authorities, also questioned whether the deal would make efficient use of the Port Authority's land.

He said the sale price of about \$29 a square foot was infinitely less than what the market would bear.

Yet for many in Queens, the project seemed to be welcome, and overdue. The waterfront area known as Queens West, of which the land sold yesterday is a part, has been the subject of promised development since the early 1980s. Had the city's bid for the 2012 Olympic Games been accepted, the site would have been used for the Olympic Village. The new development would fill the fallow land just south of a handful of high-rise apartment buildings that have appeared only in the past few years.

This is one more example of how Long Island City is in the midst of a renaissance, said Councilman Eric Gioia, who represents Long Island City and lives in one of the buildings along the water. For too long, our waterfront has been neglected and forgotten.

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