

# Affordable, Green Housing



Co-op Apartment Buildings

Photo Credit: Daniel Lim

## GOAL:

Take a leadership role to green buildings while organizing the community to address housing quality and affordability issues.



With a large, diverse population living in a small area, Jackson Heights is uniquely vibrant. The density that contributes to this vibrancy, however, also poses housing challenges: the substantial population growth in the neighborhood over the past two decades fueled by the unique community character and the quality of local real estate has begun to put pressure on the real estate market and many residents. Rents and housing costs are rising, and there are few sites available to create new affordable housing. The loss of existing affordable rental apartments to deregulation and growing concern for housing quality, all combine to require new creative solutions for the community to grow while meeting the needs of seniors and low income residents. With the convergence of all of these issues, it is no surprise that a substantial portion of the participants in the Green Agenda vision sessions identified housing as the most important area of concern.

## Affordability and Overcrowding

More than one third of Community District 3's renters spend over 50 percent of their income on rent and may therefore have trouble paying for other essentials like food, clothing, health care, and transportation.<sup>1</sup> Many families in Jackson Heights are "doubling up," sharing the rent burden between more people, and as a result are living in apartments that are too small and crowded for their families. Community District 3 also has a larger share of tenants living in severely overcrowded housing (with more than 1.5 people per room) than any other neighborhood in New York City.<sup>2</sup> Between 1990 and 2000, as much as 73 percent of the new housing in Queens was created through the illegal conversion of one and two family homes to three or more unit dwellings. Because these units are not registered with city agencies they can pose safety issues.<sup>3</sup> They indicate a dire need for affordable housing.

---

1 Housing New York City 2005. NYC Department of Housing Preservation and Development.

2 Furman Center State of the Communities Report, 2004 (citing 2002 data from NYC Housing and Vacancy Survey)

3 Citizens' Housing & Planning Council (2003), New York's Underground Housing, The Urban Prospect, June/July. Volume 9, Number 2.

## Quality and Safety

1.5 percent of Jackson Heights' households have 'severe' quality issues – units that have five or more health and safety problems like rats or roach infestation, unsafe wiring, holes in walls and ceilings, or other issues<sup>4</sup>.

Green Agenda participants saw an opportunity not only to address these critical issues of housing affordability and quality, but also to connect these issues to environmental initiatives, identifying buildings and projects that can install green roofs, or produce renewable energy and retrofitting buildings to reduce their energy use and energy cost. Jackson Heights' Brulene Co-Op apartments on 94<sup>th</sup> Street have already lead the way by becoming the first building in New York City to receive New York Energy \$mart loans to retrofit their building. These improvements pay both environmental and economic dividends. They can reduce air pollution generated by Jackson Heights' buildings, many of which burn dirtier types of heating oil.<sup>5</sup> The improvements can also yield significant cost savings for building owners, helping to make housing more affordable. Energy costs can be a significant financial burden for low-income households and weatherizing existing homes or using alternative energy sources to reduce energy costs can therefore have substantial benefits for the community in terms of better air quality and fewer emissions, and result in more affordable housing opportunities.

Jackson Heights' housing is meeting the needs of some residents, but there are serious issues that are not being addressed and opportunities for innovation that the community would like to take immediate action on.

---

4 Furman Center State of the Communities Report, 2004 (citing 2002 data from NYC Housing and Vacancy Survey)

5 Environmental Defense Fund, 2009. [http://www.edf.org/documents/10085\\_EDF\\_Heating\\_Oil\\_Report.pdf](http://www.edf.org/documents/10085_EDF_Heating_Oil_Report.pdf)

# Affordable, Green Housing



## 20. Organize Tenants and Owners.

As a first step to further action, create an association of tenants and owners to advocate and act on behalf of the neighborhood. The association will help ensure existing safety and heating regulations are enforced, help tenants negotiate with landlords, and provide superintendents, owners and co-op boards with the assistance in making their buildings healthier and less energy intensive.



Short Term



Community Groups



Inexpensive

## 21. Increase Awareness of Housing Issues.

Launch a public awareness campaign to draw attention to housing issues and conditions in Jackson Heights. Hold workshops on tenants' rights that encourage the reporting of safety, heating and health issues. Provide politicians with information on the need for legislation that will preserve existing affordable units.



Short Term



Inexpensive



Community Groups

## 22. Create Affordable Units.

Explore funding, incentives and partnerships for the development of low income and senior housing.



Medium Term



Funding Needed



Community Groups



Government

## 23. Protect Affordable Units.

Identify ways to protect and improve the safety of affordable housing units.



Medium Term



Government



## 24. Green Existing Buildings.

Find partners for green building initiatives such as green roofs, reflective roofs that reduce cooling costs, weatherization, energy retrofits, solar panels and other renewable energy opportunities. Potential partners include contractors, labor unions, home owners, superintendents, co-op boards, renters and landlords. Connect partners to skills training programs that provide the information needed to make buildings greener.



Medium Term



Somewhat Expensive



Local Businesses

## Next Steps

Initiative	Milestones for 2011
20 Organize Tenants and Owners	Convene interested residents and homeowners to create a tenant and homeowners association.
21 Increase Awareness of Housing Issues	Compile resources and research on housing issues in neighborhood and make printed pamphlets and electronic documents available.
22 Create Affordable Units	Convene a volunteer board to further discuss the goals and structure of a community development corporation.
23 Protect Affordable Units	Conduct a census of non-registered residential units to more accurately gauge the scope of the issue in the community.
24 Green Existing Buildings	Using available information on building age, energy type and demographics, identify and map target buildings with high energy costs that may be eligible for retrofit or alternative energy incentives and tax credits.