

Affordable housing for Staten Island: City's shaping a strategy



rezone for affordable housing. Bay Street, bounded by Victory Boulevard to the north, Sands Street to the south, the Staten Island Rail Road to the east and the Van Duzer Street to the west. (Staten Island Advance/ Jan Somma-Hammel)

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CITY HALL -- The city is thinking about affordable housing differently on Staten Island, where homeowners and mistrust of development prevail.

Most of the borough will be untouched by **Mayor Bill de Blasio's ambitious plans to create or preserve 200,000 affordable apartments over the next decade.** But that doesn't mean Staten Island is left off the city's blueprint entirely.

"This is a priority for the de Blasio administration," Borough President James Oddo said. "It's coming. So how do you make this not just acceptable to Staten Islanders but do it in a

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way that really benefits everyone?"

De Blasio's plans for new affordable housing on Staten Island are largely pegged to the ongoing redevelopment of the more densely populated North Shore. Preservation efforts also focus in that part of the borough, as few existing apartments can be found further south.

"When you look at the North Shore, it does have transit access and it lends itself more to that density than other parts of the Island," said Carolee Fink, chief development officer at the city's Economic Development Corp.

THE PLAN SO FAR

The city helped preserve 1,005 affordable apartments here from the launch of the mayor's plan through August. **More than half of these will be part of the rehabilitated former Arlington Terrace apartments in Mariners Harbor.**

While the city also provides mortgage assistance loans to homeowners to prevent foreclosure, the de Blasio administration emphasizes multifamily rehabilitation and density creation.

Just 248 new affordable apartments were put under construction here from the beginning of the plan through August -- **the fewest of all five boroughs.**

'TOUGH' CHANGE

City officials have said this is partially because the Island has higher average income levels, so some neighborhoods are less in need of affordable housing.

Staten Island has largest proportion of homeowners and the smallest number of rental housing in all five boroughs, according to 2014 estimates from the U.S. Census released in September.

Many Islanders also harbor a deep sense of insecurity over development and new housing -- affordable or otherwise.

"They associate growth with the 1960s and the 1970s model -- when you build and you don't think about transportation or other stuff," Richard Flanagan, a political science professor at the College of Staten Island, said.

Though de Blasio's plan has a tight timeline, the city is trying to stress development that puts neighborhoods in context. Officials know Islanders won't abide by extremely tall buildings, for instance.

"In any community, change is going to be tough," Fink said. "You've got to be honest about what the issues are and what you're talking about."

'AFFORDABLE' MISCONCEPTION

Talking about affordable housing on Staten Island is difficult because there continues to be a misconception among residents that it's akin to low-income or public housing.

"North Shore Staten Islanders are even more concerned when they hear 'affordable

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Affordable Housing on Staten Island

A total 1,266 affordable housing units were preserved or created under de Blasio's plan from when he took office through this past August.

-- North Shore: 1,005 units were preserved and 208 new units are under construction

-- Mid-Island: 9 units were preserved and 19 new units are under construction

-- South Shore: 4 units were preserved and 21 new units are under construction

North Shore Staten Islanders are even more concerned when they hear 'affordable housing' because it is felt as if the North Shore is where you put every social program," said Alfred Gill, executive director of Neighborhood Housing Services of Staten Island. "With that legacy, folks are having a tough time detaching themselves from this notion that these affordable units are going to include a lot of low-income residents."

In reality, affordable means rents don't exceed 30 percent of a household's income. **Depending on zoning requirements, which determine eligibility using the area's median income, this could mean affordable housing for low- or middle-income households.**

The city is hoping to change zoning regulations to encourage or mandate affordable housing on Staten Island and beyond.

THE BAY STREET CORRIDOR

Right now, there are fewer areas here zoned for new multi-family residential developments than other boroughs.

That's where the Bay Street Corridor comes in.

Watch: A tour of the Bay Street Corridor

The city is hoping to rezone a 14-block stretch of Bay Street for taller, residential buildings to spur affordable housing.

Recognizing the city's desire for affordability, Oddo pointed the de Blasio administration to the Bay Street Corridor last year. A 14-block stretch currently zoned for manufacturing, the corridor is next to the upcoming **URL@Staten Island** and **Lighthouse Point**.

"If done correctly, it fits nicely into a lot of the things already underway there," Oddo said.

The Bay Street Corridor is one of 15 areas across the five boroughs where the city hopes to add density. Those areas would be subject to a proposed requirement, known as **mandatory inclusionary zoning**, that would force developers there to keep at least 25 percent of new units for lower-income residents. Developers used to only have to keep some units affordable if they needed city help.

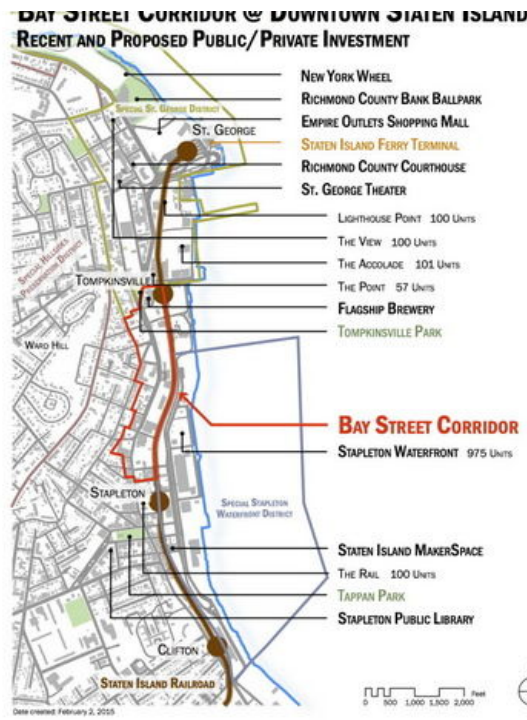
Under the plans being reviewed by the City Planning Commission, there would be two options for rezoning. The first would require 25 percent of a development's units be set aside for households making 60 percent of the area's median income, which is now \$46,620 for a family of three. The second would mandate 30 percent of units be for households with average earnings of 80 percent of the area's median income or \$62,150 for a family of three.

Planning would work with the local Council member to determine which rezoning works best.

The member would also be authorized to allow for a moderate-income option for developments that don't receive a city subsidy. This would only be allowed in middle-income areas.

'LOTS OF NEEDS'

The city thinks that option could work in the Bay Street Corridor, being eyed for housing to serve a range of income groups and populations.



Department of City Planning

"Staten Island is often looked at as one Island with one type of housing need but that's not the case -- we have lots of needs here," real estate broker John Pitera of Casandra Properties said.

In particular, the city has noted housing needs to serve the borough's aging population and young adults. Remaining a homeowner is difficult for seniors, and younger Islanders will have a tough time buying right away.

Both Oddo and Councilwoman Debi Rose (D-North Shore) think the housing should primarily serve Islanders.

"I'm not looking to raid Williamsburg," Oddo said.

Locals are given preference for half of affordable units going up in their community district. But the city also wants to attract new residents -- young professionals who might see Staten Island as a cheaper alternative.

'REAL PLANNING'

Even if Islanders don't fill the housing themselves, the city's strategy for increasing density is intended to benefit the borough overall.

The city notes that street and shoreline improvements, potential flood protection, school capacity, waterfront access and recreation are needed for the Bay Street Corridor plans to work.

"This isn't about us coming in and taking over communities or changing them," Fink said.

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Islanders have long argued that they don't get their fair share -- from mass transit and education to health care and road improvements.

Islanders shy away from density, but

that might be the best argument for increasing city services. A case could be made for a fast ferry to the South Shore, for example, if residents there were open to developing more housing and creating more ridership.

The nature of the process to approve the rezoning empowers community voices to argue for what they want. This is particularly true for Rose, as the City Council typically defers to local members when approving or striking down matters of land use.

What is 'affordable housing'?

Affordable means rents don't exceed 30 percent of a household's income. For more information, click [here](#).

Rose said she would not support affordable housing on the North Shore without necessary infrastructure improvements.

The mayor's mandatory inclusionary housing plan will go through public review over the next few months. For now, the Bay Street Corridor is the only rezoning the city is considering for Staten Island. That proposal is expected to enter the land use process next year.

"I see this as a great time for Staten Island," Rose said. "For once, there's going to be some real planning."

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Carolee Fink, chief development officer at the city's Economic Development Corp
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And no one mentioned the 800lb gorilla in the room.....INFRASTRUCTURE.....wonder how long it will take for the Port Richmond Sewer Treatment Plant to implode!

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si_return

2 days ago

Who does not spend at least 30% of their income on market rate housing? Why have a child in NYC when combined income is under 46k?

If the city really wanted to clean up these areas the developers would build condos and coops with no incentives.

But without a victim class the Democrats do not have a platform.

No I am not republican.

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2 days ago

Richard Flanagan, poly sci prof. At CSI, commented that SI'ers think of 'growth as the 1960's and 70's model, " when you build and transportation and other stuff is considered." For goodness sake, that's STILL one of the biggest issues about development of the North Shore. I think everyone on SI knows that transportation is a great concern to residents. I have read in the SI Advance on many occasions that developers, politicians and planners are 'turning a blind eye' to the quality of life of current borough residents.

How about securing MTA funding for transportation infrastructure for current SI'ers BEFORE swamping us with affordable housing?

I know, this makes too much sense!

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