

Coalition fights for affordable living

Group reacts to housing crisis

By Stephen Witt

Standing beneath one of Brooklyn's gleaming new high-rise luxury buildings, a local lawmaker, along with clergy, City University of New York representatives and several non-profit organizations, launched a new effort to preserve affordable housing.

The multifaceted plan is aimed at addressing both the affordable housing crisis and the displacement of working and moderate-income families and individuals in Fort Greene, Clinton Hill, Prospect Heights and other central Brooklyn neighborhoods.

The plan was unveiled in the shadows of the recently constructed 30-story Forte Condominium building at 230 Ashland Place and Fulton Street, where condo units are being offered at between \$575,000 and \$1.2 million.

"The displacement of low- and moderate-income residents from our community is not a black issue or a white issue, it is all about the color green," said Assembly member Hakeem Jeffries.

"Both tenants and owners have a target on their back, falling prey to predatory landlords and predatory banks that seek to snatch away their homes in order to double and triple profits," he added. "This must end and it must end now."

Jeffries said the plan includes three components starting with CUNY Community Legal Resource Network providing free legal assistance for residents in the aforementioned communities faced with wide-ranging landlord harassment including frivolous non payment claims, rent overcharges, high-pressure buy-out offers and the failure to make repairs or provide clean, safe living conditions.

The legal assistance, which will be paid for through a \$100,000 state allocation and a \$75,000 CUNY contribution, will also be available for homeowners facing foreclosure or saddled with a subprime loan.

Client intake for the free legal service will occur from 4:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m., Tuesdays and Thursdays at the New York City College of Technology, 300 Jay Street in Room N-622.

The second component of the plan is for lawmakers and clergy to work closely with two non-profit organizations in the area — the Pratt Area Community Council (PACC) and the Fifth



Assembly member Hakeem Jeffries stands in the shadows of the 30-story Forte Condominium building at 230 Ashland Place to talk about a new affordable housing initiative.

Photo By Paul Martinka

Avenue Committee (FAC) -- to help organize tenants.

The third component of the plan is for Albany to overhaul the vacancy decontrol laws. Under current law, once a rent reaches \$2,000 a month threshold, the rental unit is no longer subject to rent control of rent stabilization.

Jeffries said this is the single most responsible law that allows for displacement and harassment by landlords to get tenants out.

Once the tenants are out, the landlords renovate the apartments and can bump up rents beyond the \$2,000 threshold and up to \$2,500 or \$3,000, Jeffries said.

Jeffries said he also is confident the City Council will override Mayor Bloomberg's recent veto of a bill that would force landlords in the city to accept federal Section 8 voucher renters.

Additionally, Jeffries supports a recent initiative by City Comptroller William Thompson to disavow putting city pension funds into real estate firms that invest in properties that could dis-

place tenants.

This matter will also be brought to the attention of State Comptroller Tom DiNapoli, said Jeffries.

The initiative to preserve affordable housing may also get some help from the softening real estate market.

A worker at the Forte Condominiums said that of the 108 units in the building, only about 30 units have residents in them, but more have been moving in of late.

Conversely, developers who include some affordable units in recently completed or current construction projects report a huge demand for their affordable units.

According to a recent New York Times article on the 38-story condo tower being built at 150 Myrtle Avenue in Fort Greene, there have been over 10,000 applicants for the 42 of 240 units that will be affordable.

Community Board 2 District Manager Rob Parris said this lack of affordable housing even affects moderate income workers like himself.

"I don't begrudge the person who can afford the million dollar apartment, but there just isn't enough at the other end of the range. I work for the city and I can't afford a \$575,000 one-bedroom apartment," Parris said.