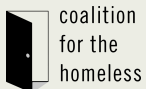


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Housing is the Solution: **A Plan to End Mass Homelessness in NYC**



Illustration by Rachelle Baker

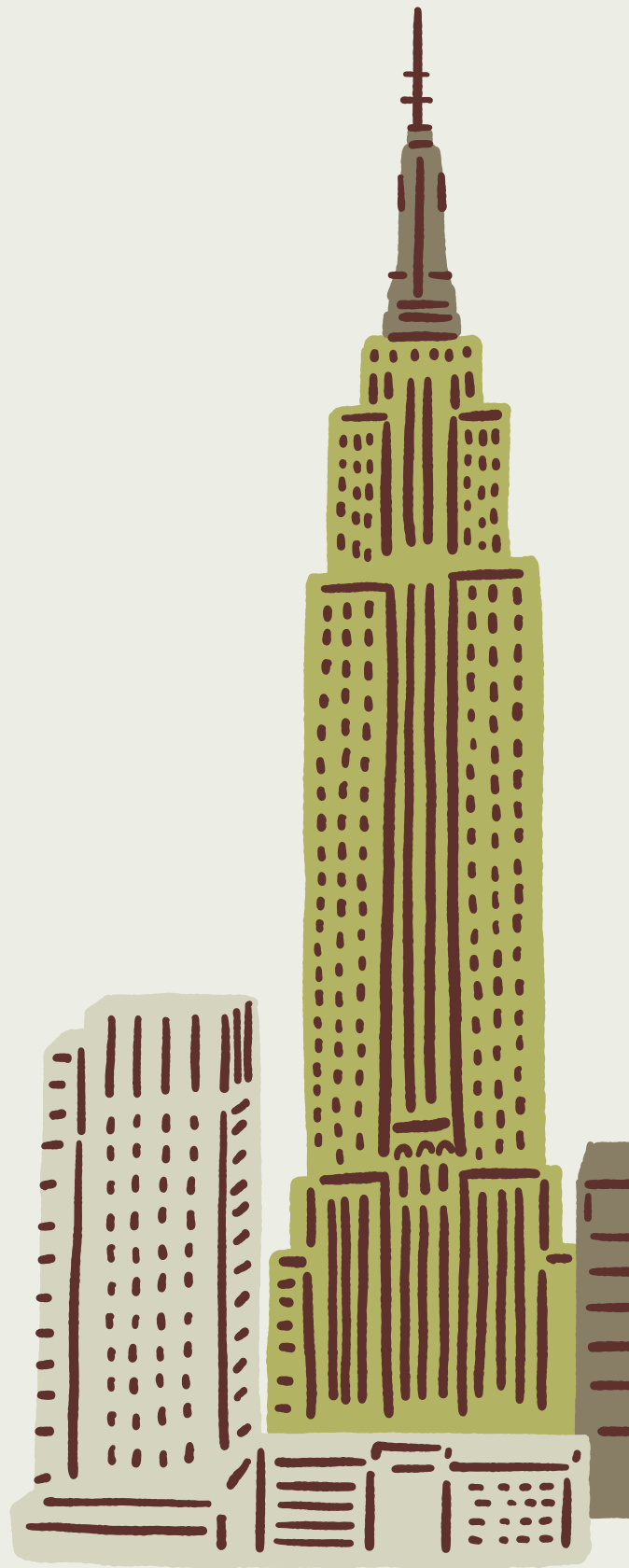


Introduction

The next mayor of New York City will face some stark contradictions. While the city boasts 350,000 millionaires, it also has a staggering 350,000 people without homes. The City can end this crisis, but for years has chosen not to. Mass homelessness continues because of the lack of political will to solve it.

The sheer scale of homelessness in New York City is a direct result of sky-high rents, the high cost of living, and a severe shortage of housing that low-income families can actually afford. On any given night, roughly 125,000 people sleep in shelters, thousands more bed down on the streets, and over 200,000 are doubled- or tripled-up in the overcrowded apartments of others.

While the recent influx of asylum seekers and other new arrivals has added to the strain, **the core problem is homegrown: the number of New Yorkers entering the Department of Homeless Services (DHS) shelter system continues to rise, even as the number of new arrivals in shelters decreases. Over the course of 2024 alone, the number of longer-term New Yorkers in shelters grew by more than 7,500 people – a 12 percent increase over the previous calendar year.**



This is mainly because of the high cost of housing in NYC.

- One-third of all New York City renters pay more than half their income toward their rent.
- Roughly three-quarters of extremely low-income renters pay more than half their income on rent.
- Half of the city's households do not have enough money to comfortably hold down an apartment, access sufficient food and basic health care, and get around.
- Despite the nearly two-year COVID eviction moratorium, over 100,000 New Yorkers have been evicted since 2016, and evictions are growing.

The housing and homelessness crisis has gone on for so long that many believe it's unsolvable. But it is not. **The next mayor can tackle mass homelessness by implementing proven and lasting solutions at the needed scale.** These solutions include providing affordable housing, quality mental health care, low-barrier shelters, and programs to prevent evictions.

Here's what the next mayor must do:



More Affordable Housing



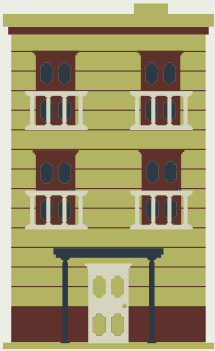
Prioritize homeless households



Prevent Evictions



Mental Health Care and Housing



Create More Affordable Housing for Those Who Need it Most

Rent is the largest household expense for most New Yorkers, and too many people are forced to choose each month whether to pay rent or feed their kids. **Extremely low-income New Yorkers are hit the hardest, and represent roughly 820,000 households. About three-quarters of those households pay more than half of their income on housing.**

If the next mayor creates more affordable housing for these households, struggling New Yorkers will have more money to spend on groceries, childcare, and healthcare. They will have more ability to buy the goods and services that fuel the city's economy. And when people struggle less, they are better able to care for their families and give back to their communities, which helps our city as a whole. **Deeply affordable housing is the key to our city's economic health.**



The next mayor must:

1. Build at least 12,000 new units of deeply-subsidized affordable housing for homeless and extremely low-income households every year for the next five years.

These units must be specifically for homeless and extremely low-income households. Simply building more market-rate housing will not solve the problem; we've seen that fail for decades. With the vacancy rate for low-rent apartments near zero, the next mayor must prioritize building deeply-subsidized housing for those who need it most. To ensure this new housing remains affordable in the long run, the next mayor must also:

- Create and fund operating subsidies: This will cover ongoing maintenance and operating costs.
- Use CityFHEPS as an operating subsidy: CityFHEPS vouchers can be used to help fund the operation of both new and existing affordable housing.
- Invest in preserving existing affordable housing: We need to protect the affordable housing we already have.

2. Fulfill the promise to create 15,000 supportive housing units within the next three years, and make sure all who need supportive housing can get it going forward.

Supportive housing is crucial. It combines

affordable housing with on-site support services for formerly homeless people with chronic health conditions, mental illnesses, and other challenges. It helps people stay housed and manage their health, leading to long-term stability – all while saving taxpayer money by reducing the use of shelters, emergency rooms, and jails.

The City promised to create 15,000 supportive housing units by 2031 (under the NY 15/15 program), but progress has stalled: as of May 2024, only 3,853 units were completed. The next mayor must award contracts for all remaining units by 2028 and make sure that there are always enough supportive housing units for all who qualify, and conduct annual assessments to determine how much investment is needed.



Prioritize Homeless Households for Federal Housing Resources

Section 8 vouchers and NYCHA (public housing) are long proven to provide long-term housing stability, but are underutilized for homeless households.

The next mayor must:

1. Increase the number of Section 8 vouchers for re-housing New Yorkers who lost their homes to 3,000.

With the recent re-opening of the Section 8 waitlist for the first time since 2009, the next mayor can help many more homeless New Yorkers move from shelters into housing. Currently, only 1,200 are set aside for people sleeping in DHS shelters.

2. Allocate at least 3,000 NYCHA units per year for households in DHS shelters.

In FY 2024, only 510 families in shelters were placed in NYCHA housing, even though there are more than 5,000 vacant NYCHA apartments.



Fix and Expand Existing Programs that Prevent Evictions and Re-House People

Several programs designed to prevent evictions and re-house homeless individuals exist, but they're not working effectively.

The next mayor must:

1. Implement the CityFHEPS expansions passed by the City Council.

Local Laws 99, 100, 101, and 102 expand CityFHEPS eligibility to prevent evictions and help working families struggling with rent. The City Council voted – twice – to extend eligibility to low-income tenants facing eviction, and passed laws to make CityFHEPS vouchers available to people who work but can't afford market rents. The next mayor must implement the package of CityFHEPS reforms passed by the City Council.

2. Streamline the CityFHEPS program.

The next mayor must address the bureaucratic

barriers, lengthy processing times, and minor errors that lead to denials or months-long delays by:

- Creating an online portal where applicants and shelter staff can submit electronic application documents, see where they are in the process, and get information about problems.
- Providing clear explanations and remedies when an application is denied or when a housing unit fails inspection requirements.
- Eliminate backlogs so people can get approved for a voucher in a timely manner, and move out quickly once they find an apartment.



3. Combat Source of Income (SOI) discrimination.

Increase funding and staffing for the City Commission on Human Rights to investigate and prosecute landlords who illegally discriminate against tenants with CityFHEPS or any other kind of housing vouchers.

4. Eliminate obstacles to supportive housing.

Supportive housing is a proven solution that stabilizes people in the long term and saves taxpayer dollars, but many people who need it face administrative obstacles.

- Remove barriers to accessing supportive housing by:
 - Making sure those applying for supportive housing get notice of placement interviews.
 - Reforming HRA's PACT/CAPS application process: The eligibility determination process needs to be less arbitrary and burdensome.
 - Creating an appeals process for eligibility denials.

- Make sure that all shelters assess residents' eligibility for supportive housing within 30 days of entry.
- Improve support for formerly incarcerated individuals: The Justice Involved Supportive Housing program needs continued investment and amended RFPs to better serve this population. Rules that exclude people exiting jails and prisons because the time they served doesn't count as being "homeless" should be removed from NY 15/15.

5. Increase funds for Right to Counsel to \$350 million per year to ensure that all low-income households have lawyers in Housing Court.

Eighty-four percent of tenants in housing court who had lawyers through the Right to Counsel program were able to stay in their homes in FY2021. But only 47 percent of tenants facing eviction currently have lawyers. The next mayor must make sure Right to Counsel has the funds needed to keep more New Yorkers from becoming homeless.



Ensure Access to Mental Health Care, Low-Barrier Shelters, and Housing

The failure to provide enough voluntary community-based mental health care, low-barrier shelters, and supportive housing has had devastating consequences for homeless people with mental illnesses – and for our city. There have been too many tragic incidents involving people living on the streets and subways who were unable to get the care they wanted and needed. Flooding the subways with police has not solved, and will not solve, the problem. The only effective solution is to connect people with the housing and mental health care they want and need.



The next mayor must:

1. Implement a True "Housing First" Program.

Housing First is a proven model that prioritizes getting people into housing first and then providing support services. Despite Housing First being invented in NYC and proven successful, the City has not renewed or expanded Housing First programs, apart from a small pilot. Existing supportive housing programs often have long waitlists and bureaucratic hurdles. The next mayor must fund experienced organizations to implement a true Housing First approach at scale, getting people off the streets and into homes quickly.

2. Rapidly open at least 4,000 new Safe Haven and stabilization beds.

These low-barrier shelters offer fewer restrictions and better support services. The current 4,000 beds are consistently full, and the additional 900 planned are insufficient. These Safe Haven beds must be available to all individuals with a history of sleeping unsheltered on the streets, not just those known to DHS outreach teams.

3. Expand and increase funding for Intensive Mobile Treatment (IMT) teams.

These teams provide intensive, community-based support and treatment, but currently have waitlists of one to two years and need to hire more experienced staff.

4. Remove NYPD and Department of Sanitation from homeless outreach.

Their involvement exacerbates distrust and hinders the work of trained outreach workers. Calls to 311 regarding homeless individuals should dispatch only trained outreach workers, potentially including peer specialists.

5. Increase the number of public bathrooms.

The lack of public bathrooms disproportionately affects all New Yorkers, especially homeless individuals. In 2024, there was a 46 percent increase in criminal and civil summonses for public urination. The next mayor must prioritize increasing the number of public bathrooms and stop issuing summonses for public urination.

Conclusion

All New Yorkers want an end to mass homelessness. The only way to get there is by acknowledging the hard facts: for decades, the City's failure to invest in enough affordable housing for the people who need it most has resulted in hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers relegated to sleeping on the streets, in subways, in shelters, and on couches and floors of others, and in hundreds of thousands more teetering on the edge of homelessness. Both the human and financial costs to this ongoing failure are profound. New York City cannot thrive until this crisis is addressed.

The next mayor of New York City must commit to investing resources where they are most needed by embracing the proven, cost-effective, and humane solutions outlined above to ensure that all New Yorkers can live in safety and dignity.



Contributors

