RECLAIM OUR HOMES
AND HOUSE ALL
NEW YORKERS NOW

MARCH 2020
UNHOUSED NEW YORKERS

Homelessness has been drastically growing in New York, particularly in New York City, over the past decade. As of January of this year, over 60,000 New York City residents were sleeping in shelters every night. In total, nearly 80,000 New York City and over 90,000 New York State residents were homeless in 2019, according to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. With housing costs continually rising and housing units affordable to low-income residents becoming more and more rare, there is no reason to believe these numbers are going anywhere but up.

HIDDEN HOMELESSNESS

In addition to the nearly 100,000 New Yorkers that are unhoused, there are hundreds of thousands of others who are overcrowding in homes across New York City and State. In New York City, over 200,000 housing units are overcrowded, and across the state, nearly 300,000 housing units are overcrowded. Members of these households are likely to be facing housing instability and could be vulnerable to homelessness in the future.
This past week, New York City confirmed the first two deaths of homeless New Yorkers from COVID-19. The New York City Department of Homeless Services (DHS) also confirmed that there were 59 positive cases of COVID amongst homeless New Yorkers as of the week ending March 29. They also identified that 17 of the positive cases were spread across 12 different shelters. This could spread amongst New York’s unhoused residents, especially since homeless residents are more likely to contract infectious diseases and often unable to follow practices, like social distancing, that might protect them.

As mentioned in the previous section, there are also nearly 300,000 housing units experiencing overcrowding. With the COVID crisis shutting down a large portion of New York’s economy, the members of these households are more vulnerable than ever. While an eviction moratorium protects them temporarily, lost wages could easily lead them to falling behind on rent and facing eviction once the moratorium is lifted.

As a result of New York’s economy shutting down, hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers have already lost their jobs. The week ending March 21, the New York Department of Labor reported that 80,000 New Yorkers successfully filed for unemployment. However, this number is merely a sign of things to come, with total job loss estimates due to the COVID crisis ranging from 800,000 to 1.2 million. In fact, while the DOL only reported 80,000 new unemployment claims, they received 1.7 million calls and 250,000 logins/day on its website. The week after, ending March 28, DOL received nearly 8 million calls and another 1.2 million calls on March 30th.

As of March 26, NYC Hospitality Alliance has already reported that nearly 70,000 employees across nearly 1,900 businesses have been laid off or furloughed since bars and restaurants have been shut down. Vijay Dandapani, head of the Hotel Association of New York City, predicted that 80 percent of New York City’s 55,000 hotel workers could face layoffs while the American Hotel and Lodging Association believes up to 50,000 hotel jobs could be lost statewide.

Nearly 1.6 million of New York’s 7 million private jobs are in the Retail Trade, Arts/Entertainment, and Accommodation & Food Services industries while another 1 million work in Manufacturing, Wholesale Trade, and Transportation & Warehousing. In New York City alone, there are over 800,000 jobs in the Retail Trade, Arts/Entertainment, and Accommodation & Food Services sectors. Many of these jobs have already been lost and more are vulnerable in the event of a prolonged shutdown and subsequent recession.

As outlined in our report last week, nearly half of all renters in New York are rent burdened, which means unemployment at this scale could threaten hundreds of thousands of residents in the immediate future.
VACANT HOTELS

STR Global, a marketing firm that analyzes hotel data, found that hotels in New York City had an occupancy rate of 16.8% for the week ending March 21st. If you apply this to the number of hotel rooms in New York City, estimated at 128,129, the number of hotel rooms occupied right now is roughly 21,500 rooms. This means over 106,000 hotel rooms are currently unoccupied in New York City alone, enough to house every homeless person across New York State.

Over the past decade, hotels and other businesses in the travel industry have used large amounts of their profits on stock buybacks, which enrich their CEOs and shareholders, but have left them short on cash on hand to pay their workers during a crisis like they are facing now. Additionally, hotels and other travel industries have asked for $150 billion to bail them out and successfully lobbied for major changes to the federal tax code that will save their industries an estimated $15 billion per year, retroactive to 2018 and in effect for at least three more years.

VACANT/UNSOLD CONDOS

According to a study by StreetEasy in 2019 that combined data from New York City’s Department of Buildings and Department of Finance, 4,109 condos that were built from 2013-2019 remained unsold. Additionally, another 5,617 condos were listed on StreetEasy for buildings yet to finish construction at the time of the study. They also found that since 2018, for every three condos constructed, only two condos constructed since 2013 were sold, meaning the number of unsold condos is only growing.

ILLEGAL AIRBNBS

Despite the fact that renting entire homes in multiple-dwelling buildings violates New York State’s Multiple Dwelling Law, thousands of units are taken off the housing market to be rented via Airbnb. In a study by McGill University, they found that between 7,000 and 13,500 housing units were removed from New York City’s housing market by Airbnb alone.

HOUSING CONNECT UNITS

Currently, there are 727 units listed on NYC’s Housing Connect website. Of these 727 units, 337 are at or above 80 percent of AMI and not affordable to the majority of New Yorkers. While all 727 units should be activated as soon as possible to house unhoused New Yorkers, the 337 units that are unlikely to meet the needs of New York’s most vulnerable residents should specifically be reclaimed to address the housing and health crisis currently facing New York.
RECLAIM OUR HOMES
HOUSE ALL NEW YORKERS NOW

[RECLAIM OUR HOMES & INVEST IN HOUSING]

92,000 people are homeless. Millions more are housing insecure. It’s time to invest billions of dollars in social housing. The government owns and subsidizes enough housing to house all homeless people in NY state; they must open this housing and house people now to keep everyone safe.

New York needs $10 Billion to immediately house the homeless, stabilize public housing, and ensure our homes are safe and secure.
  · $7 Billion to House the Homeless and invest in social housing
  · $3 Billion for Public Housing

[CANCEL RENT]

No one should be displaced because they cannot pay rent, especially when they are unable to work during a global health crisis. While an eviction moratorium and mortgage suspension were good first steps, the millions of New Yorkers who rent are still not fully protected. **We need automatic forgiveness of any rent, mortgage, and/or utility payments owed or accumulated during the length of the current crisis.**

Additionally, there needs to be a rent freeze enacted immediately. **No one’s rent should increase over the duration of this crisis.**

[House the Homeless]

92,000 people are homeless. We cannot continue the status quo. **People who are living in a shelter or are living on the street should be rehoused immediately.** Shelters are one of the most unsafe places to be in this moment. **From a public health perspective, it’s vital that we rehouse every single homeless family immediately—as an entitlement.** We must act as quickly as possible to get every single homeless household rent assistance immediately and permanently.

**Emergency Access to Vacant Apartments/Hotels**

There are 106,000 vacant hotel rooms, up to 13,000 illegal Airbnbs, over 4,000 unsold condos, and over 700 units on Housing Connect in New York City right now. That means **roughly 120,000 hotel rooms and housing units sit empty while 92,000 people remain unhoused.** These vacant units must be made accessible immediately to house all homeless New Yorkers.

**Invest in public housing, subsidized housing, and housing owned by not-for-profits**

These affordable housing models often operate on a small margin and should be able to continue to operate in this moment as they are needed more than ever. With large swaths of New Yorkers facing unemployment and financial instability due to this health crisis, permanently low-income housing units are as important as ever to provide stability to New York residents and their communities.


3) https://www.usich.gov/homelessness-statistics/ny/

4) Overcrowding is defined as >1 persons/room and severely overcrowding is >1.5 persons/room

5) U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 5-Year Estimates, 2014-2018


13) U.S. Census Bureau, OnTheMap, 2017


17) https://therealdeal.com/2020/03/18/hotel-industry-seeks-150b-bailout-as-marriott-begins-furlough/


19) https://streeteasy.com/blog/nycs-unsold-condos/

20) https://www.politico.com/states/f/?id=00000161-44f2-daac-a3e9-5ff3d8740001

21) Based on analysis of units available on NYC’s Housing Connect website on 3/31/2020

22) https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/planning/download/pdf/plans-studies/m1-hotel-text/nyc-hotel-market-analysis.pdf?r=a