



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Jose Peralta

Peralta to Mayor: Keep Affordable Housing Promise

JOSE PERALTA May 31, 2013

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State Senator Jose Peralta was joined by the Queens Housing Coalition and Make the Road New York today in calling on Mayor Michael Bloomberg to “stop the bureaucratic wrecking ball” that has laid waste to more than 1,000 units of affordable housing slated to be built in Willets Point and threatens the construction of all of the 1,920 affordable units that were supposed to be built.

The Willets Point development plan agreed to by the City Council in 2008 included the construction of 1,920 units of affordable housing. Construction was to begin at the outset of the development process, or after the initial remediation. Under a revised plan, construction of 875 affordable units will not begin until at least 2025, if at all.

“If they put a wrecking ball to 2,000 units of affordable housing to make room for a shopping mall, it would be front-page news and there would be no end to the outrage,” Sen. Peralta said. “That’s exactly what’s happening here. It’s just as outrageous. It’s just as unacceptable.

“Mr. Mayor, stop the bureaucratic wrecking ball. Let’s hold everyone to their word and provide the affordable housing this community so desperately needs. That way, in a few years, instead of a New York City mayor coming into this community to complain about a census undercount, the visit will be to tout this area as a model of mixed-use development

where everyone has a dignified place to live.”

Former New York City Comptroller William C. Thompson, Jr. said: “Middle-class and working-class families in Queens and around the City need more affordable housing. I’m concerned about plans to scale back the development of affordable units in Willets Point and urge Mayor Bloomberg to recommit to building quality, affordable housing in every borough. As Mayor, I will work to expand middle-income and low-income housing so we can end the middle-class squeeze and allow more New Yorkers to remain in the City they love.”

Assemblyman Francisco Moya said: "Developers have an obligation to address the needs and concerns of the local community. All too often we have seen in working class neighborhoods and communities of color that promises are not kept. The community surrounding Willets Point needs to be guaranteed by the developers and city officials that the one element of this project that will benefit residents the most will be fulfilled: the construction of affordable housing units. The proposed delays and reduced number of units is not acceptable. I look forward to working with the City Council, local community boards, and the Queens Development Group to make sure that our voices are heard, promises are kept, and that we will not have our communities needs pushed to the side."

Council Member Julissa Ferreras said: “Affordable housing is a necessity for Willets Point and has always remained my priority. Since day one, I have worked to negotiate with the Administration to secure a fair plan that will ensure 35 percent of the new apartment units being built are affordable housing units. I am appreciative of the support that I have received from my colleague in local government, Senator Peralta, to bring affordable housing to Willets Point now.”

Council Member Daniel Dromm said: “It is unconscionable that the Administration is spending substantial resources on enticing a major league soccer stadium to the area but

refuses to reaffirm a commitment to ensuring that affordable housing will be included in any future development at Willet's Point. New Yorkers who work hard and live in the area should be prioritized over special interests who will give little back to the community."

Ivan Contreras, Coordinator of Queens Housing Coalition, said: "According to the official contract between the City and the Joint Venture neither party are legally obligated to build the ramps which are needed to develop the housing part. This means that they can walk away from the project leaving the community with a mall, a hotel, a retail center and a parking lot and not building a unit of housing. I don't think this is what the community wants and needs. New York is in a housing crisis we need affordable housing and we need it now"

Leandra Requena, Queens resident and member of Make the Road New York, said: "Members of the community fought hard for affordable housing to be included in the original Willets Point agreement. Now the developers are backing away from this commitment. After a history of broken promises, the City should not allow this developer to build a mall at Willets Point, especially when this community does not need yet another mall."

As the plan stands now, there may be no affordable housing ever constructed as part of the Willets Point development. That's because housing construction may not begin until the city builds additional exit ramps off the Van Wyck Expressway.

The problem is that the city appears to have no intention of completing such construction before 2024, delaying the building of affordable housing until at least 2025. Moreover, if the ramp construction is not completed by December 1, 2025, the developer, the Queens Development Group, is under no obligation to build any affordable housing whatsoever. And, ultimately, it could be the Queens Development Group deciding when the ramps are built, should the developer undertake the job.

But even if the ramps are built in a timely manner, the developer may buy its way out of its affordable housing obligation.

“These conditions put the construction of any affordable housing units in serious doubt,” Sen. Peralta wrote in a letter last week to Mayor Bloomberg, City Council Christine Quinn and Queens Borough President Helen Marshall. “My community and other communities affected by the Willets Redevelopment simply can’t afford to wait or rely on conditional promises. We need answers and we need results.”