



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

James Sanders Jr.

Some 300 People Attend Senator Sanders' Successful Two-Part Housing Conference

JAMES SANDERS JR. December 15, 2016



Senator James Sanders Jr. (D-Rochdale Village, Far Rockaway), yesterday held a two-part Housing Conference, with the first half taking place in Jamaica and the second half in Far Rockaway, to provide constituents with information related to affordable housing. It included workshops on how to apply for affordable housing, upcoming construction developments with affordable units, and information on tenants rights. There were also tables where representatives from various agencies and organizations handed out housing related materials and spoke one-on-one with attendees regarding their individual issues and

concerns. Some 300 people registered to attend the conference.

“A lack of affordable housing is a critical issue facing our community,” Sanders said. “Most residents simply cannot pay the high market rate prices for real estate and rentals. There are options available, however, and that’s the reason for this conference today – to educate the public on how they can stay in the neighborhoods that some of them have called home their entire lives. We also want to promote home ownership as a way to increase personal wealth and combat gentrification.”

One of the key messages conveyed by the presenters at the conference is “You have to be in it to win it,” meaning you have to apply for affordable housing, usually through a lottery, in order to have a chance at obtaining an affordable unit. One of the best ways to do this is through the Housing Connect website, an online portal run by the NYC Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD). Applicants begin by creating an account on Housing Connect, containing information such as how many people will be living in the unit, one’s current address, and income. There are usually units set aside, also known as adapted units, for people who have mobility disabilities or are hearing impaired. There are also preferences for people who live within the Community Board where the housing will be located as well as for current city employees.

Once an applicant creates an online account, they can then apply with one click to affordable housing complexes that become available. In addition, an alert will be sent out by email every time a new development opens up. For those who do not have a computer, these affordable housing developments are usually advertised in local newspapers as well as being online, so they can contact an individual developer and request a paper application. They can also apply through a housing ambassador such as Neighborhood Housing Services.

Doron Taleporos of HPD said that a lot of the affordable housing available in Queens right now is located in Long Island City and Astoria. He also added that for every 100 units that are open, Housing Connect may get 150,000 applications or more. Taleporos also said that a low credit score is not a reason for an applicant to be rejected however they do look at open cases of accounts in collection or public judgments.

There are a handful of affordable housing complexes coming to Queens in the near future. Among them is Beach Green Dunes in Far Rockaway, which will feature 100 units – studios and one-bedroom apartments. The lottery has already begun and the deadline to apply is February 6, 2017. Representatives from Blue Stone, the developer for the project said they received 12,600 applicants in the first three days. Another project coming down the line is a senior housing development that is an annex to Northeastern Towers. It is being built by the 5th Avenue Committee and will consist of 130 units, mostly studios and one-bedroom apartments. Construction will begin in 2018 and will be completed in 2020.

Brian Honan of the NYC Housing Authority (NYCHA) called public housing “the only true affordable housing,” noting that 500,000 people live in NYCHA projects. He also spoke about how the agency is “pressed financially,” which causes repairs to take more time. However, New York City's implementation of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's Rental Assistance Demonstration (RAD) program, is an alternate way to fund public housing which may offer relief, allowing for the modernization of units and ensuring affordability.

Honan said Ocean Bay Apartments in Far Rockaway on the bay side will be converted to Section 8 with 1,400 units to be managed by a private company starting in January 2017 under the RAD program. Those already living in the converted units will be able to stay, however new prospective tenants will be put on a waiting list.

Once one finds a place to live, they should know their rights. Amy Hammersmith of Queens Legal Services spoke about tenants' rights and she said while they vary depending on the type of housing one occupies, there are certain rights that are common for everyone. There are protections against harassment by a landlord, which may include physical or verbal threats, repairs at odd hours and unnecessary inspections. Tenants are also protected from discrimination under laws like the Fair Housing Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act. A landlord cannot discriminate against a tenant based on race, gender, sexual orientation, family status (whether they have children), marital status, national origin or immigrant status.

If tenants are harassed or discriminated against, they can take their landlord to housing court or file a complaint with the Human Rights Commission. Also, a landlord cannot evict a tenant without proper notice. All tenants have the right to live in a habitable apartment where repairs are made in a timely manner.

We would like to thank the other Queens elected officials who partnered with Senator Sanders for this event. They are: Senator Leroy Comrie, Assembly Members Vivian Cook and Michele Titus, Assembly Member-Elect Clyde Vanel, and City Council Members Donovan Richards and I. Daneek Miller.

In addition, we would also like to thank our sponsors: Cross Island Realtors, Jamaica Center for Arts and Learning, State Farm, Subway and the Home Depot.