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Affordable housing options for the average NYer

By LUCY COHEN BLATTER

New York City can feel like a playground for the rich (\$3,000 studios anyone?), but there are, believe it or not, still some options for low-, middle- and moderate-income New Yorkers.

The mayor's New Housing Marketplace Plan set a goal of financing the creation and preservation of 165,000 units of affordable housing by 2014. According to the city, they've already met 85% of their goal.

But many say there needs to be more. "There isn't enough middle-income housing," said Dean Roberts, a real estate attorney who's

worked with clients buying Mitchell-Lama subsidized housing. "There's low- and free-market, but frankly if you're really poor or really rich you can live in New York. In between, it's pretty hard."

To be eligible for any kind of subsidized housing, your income must meet certain requirements, based on the Area Median Income (AMI) and on household size. In 2012, the NYC median income is \$83,000 for a family of four.



Photo credit: Shelia Martin, Chief Operating Officer of the Housing Partnership (Nancy Borowick)

The city's Housing Development Corporation caps incomes for low-income housing at 40% and 60% of AMI, so individuals could make up to \$23,240 and a family of four up to \$49,800 to qualify.

For moderate- to middle-income programs, HDC tenants can make 100% to 175% of AMI, depending on the development, meaning a family of four can, in some cases, can bring in as much as \$145,250, and a single person as much as \$101,675.

Because demand for subsidized housing so far exceeds the supply, city programs usually rely on lotteries (Lady Luck comes in handy).

So how can you find out about affordable housing? "The city websites [nyc.gov/housing] are a good place to start," said Frank Lang of St. Nick's Alliance, a nonprofit that specializes in affordable housing for North Brooklyn.

Here are some options for (somewhat) affordable housing in NYC:

80/20 program

Rental buildings that take part in the 80/20 program reserve 20% of units for those making 40% to 50% of the AMI. The other apartments are market-rate. The upside: The program allows lower-income residents to live in seriously high-end rental buildings, like Emerald Green and MiMA. Unsurprisingly, the competition is fierce and the buildings rely on lotteries. Interviews and home visits are required.

"These are a good option if you can get into them," Roberts said. "They're harder to find now."

Mitchell-Lama units

This city and state-subsidized program was created in 1955 to provide affordable rentals and co-ops to moderate to middle-income families. Two-thirds of the units are co-ops.

At one co-op unit in Queens, a leasing agent told us that a three-bedroom costs about \$120,000, and a two-bedroom about \$87,000. No mortgages are allowed.

A leasing agent at a rental on the Upper West Side (with a 15-year waiting list) said studios are \$550 to \$600 and one-bedrooms are \$700 to \$750.

Each development has its own income requirements and rents and sales prices depend on those. And for co-ops, there's a resale limit - owners can accrue interest, but can't turn a large profit.

The problem? Mitchell-Lama buildings aren't being built anymore and some are leaving the system (especially rentals).

Also, though there are open waitlists across the boroughs, some of the more desirable buildings have closed waiting lists and even open lists can span years (though, unlike new affordable housing units, Mitchell-Lama buildings don't rely on lotteries).

Those interested can contact specific building management or check out open lists at nyc.gov/hpd.

Mixed-income for sale La Celia, in East Harlem, is a co-op building where prices range from \$140,000 to \$373,000 and income caps range from around \$45,000 to around \$145,000, based on the sizes of the apartments.

"These kinds of buildings, which cater to people with 80% to 175% AMI, are geared toward middle-income buyers," said Shelia Martin, vice president and COO of Housing Partnership Development Corp., an affordable housing agency that worked on the building.

The building is still taking applications, and is doing the lottery now. There are usually project-specific resale restrictions.

Fort Greene's Atlantic Terrace made headlines last year when it began selling units to people of mixed incomes - 20 market-rate apartments were sold alongside 60 affordable units (ranging from low- to middle-income).

Unsurprisingly, all affordable units are sold-out.

Rent-stabilized apartments

According to the city's Rent Guidelines Board, apartments built before 1974 in a building with six or more units are generally rent-stabilized, meaning the tenant has an automatic right to lease renewal and the landlord can only raise the rent by a few percentage points.

For this reason, rent-stabilized apartments are often significantly lower than market rate. (Note: When an apartment hits \$2,500, it's no longer stabilized and the income cap for rent stabilization is \$200,000.)

Alyssa Galella found her rent-stabilized East Village studio on Craigslist.

"Brokers were telling me I couldn't get anything for less than \$1,800." Her place was \$1,693.30 and she was told market rate was \$2,000.

Galella thinks her strong credit helped her land the apartment (credit requirements are often stricter in stabilized units).