



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Jose Peralta

Sen. Peralta, Housing Advocates Condemn ‘Bait-and-Switch Tactics’ Used To Win Support For Willets Point Development

JOSE PERALTA May 22, 2013

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State Senator Jose Peralta and affordable housing advocates are calling for the mayor and Willets Point developers to provide “rock-solid assurances” that affordable housing will be built in the quantity and within the time frame specified in the plan approved by the City Council.

The Willets Point development plan agreed to by the Council 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 the revised plan, construction of 875 affordable units will not begin until at least 2025, if at all,

“These bait-and-switch tactics cannot be tolerated,” Sen. Peralta wrote in a letter to Mayor Michael Bloomberg, City Council Speaker Christine Quinn and Queens Borough President Helen Marshall. “I will be urging community boards that approved the original plan to reconsider their support in light of the significant changes made to it. I urge the City Council to do the same.

“It is imperative that the Council, community boards and all of the public receive from the city and the developers rock-solid assurances that the number of affordable units originally

called for in the plan be built and made available in a timely manner,” Sen. Peralta added.

Ivan Contreras, the coordinator of the Queens Housing Coalition, an alliance of seven community-based organizations whose objective is to preserve and advocate for the development and preservation of affordable housing in Queens, is also troubled by the changes in the plan and shifting accountability.

“Most importantly, the city and developers have attempted to appease community concerns by making mere verbal promises, but have yet to commit to contractual obligations to follow through with their commitments,” Contreras said. “Such a lack of accountability in this long-term project means that the community faces an immense risk of losing out on the potential benefits of the project—namely, affordable housing, which is so desperately needed in the surrounding communities.”

As it 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 noted. “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.”

The Queens Housing Coalition is an alliance of seven community organizations—Centro Hispano Cuzcatlan, Queens Community House, Catholic Migration Services, Woodside on the Move, Chhaya CDC, MinKwon Center for Community Action and Asian Americans For Equality.

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Attachment: Letter from Peralta to Bloomberg, Quinn and Marshall.