

Five Things You Can Do About Gentrification in New York City

1. **TALK TO PEOPLE** on your block and in your neighborhood. If you are a gentrifier, *talk to the people getting gentrified*. If gentrifiers are moving in and you're afraid you're going to be pushed out, *talk to the gentrifiers*. If we don't talk with each other we can't work together and if we don't work together gentrification will proceed unchecked. Talk, argue, become friends or enemies, but if we ignore each other it will only deepen the divide and make it harder to change anything. These connections are the best foundation for building alliances and creating community coalitions that can stop displacement and protect residents and businesses. Too many people get outraged at what's going on and never talk to anyone else about it, least of all the people who are "different." The people united will never be defeated!
2. **SAVE THE SHRINKING PUBLIC DOMAIN**. Public parks, schools, community centers – everything public that is needed for affordable neighborhoods – are shrinking and getting privatized. At the neighborhood level, we need to protect and expand the commons. Keep the libraries open. Stop concessions from taking over the parks. Save neighborhood schools and keep them integrated and public. Don't let services for the less fortunate – like soup kitchens and homeless shelters – be driven out by high rents.
3. **DEMAND TRULY AFFORDABLE HOUSING**. The first priority must be to protect existing affordable housing, including low-rent private buildings, Mitchell-Lama cooperatives and public housing. We also need to make sure that newly built housing is truly affordable. "Affordable" housing built with city subsidies is not affordable to those who need it the most. Join with others to demand the city change its definition of "affordable." The city should use neighborhood-level median incomes and give priority to those making less than 60% of median income, especially people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. All housing subsidized with public funds should be protected as affordable in perpetuity by using regulatory agreements and community land trusts. This will keep it from

going back into the private market and feeding gentrification. Finally, the city's rent laws must be strengthened to protect the lowest income tenants, stop evictions, and prosecute landlords that evade the laws.

4. **REGULATE AND TAX REAL ESTATE SPECULATORS.** Demand an end to the public giveaways to developers – the 421-a and J-51 tax abatements, tax exemptions for stadiums, infrastructure subsidies like the #7 subway extension to serve the luxury enclave rising at Hudson Yards, etc. The city should recapture the value created by its upzonings by heavily taxing developers, and use the money to help improve the public domain throughout the city where the needs are greatest. The city should increase taxes on habitable housing that is vacant for more than a year and expropriate housing vacant more than two years. This will help put an end to rampant speculation and free up vacant units.

5. **CONFRONT AND CHALLENGE ELECTED OFFICIALS AND CANDIDATES AT ALL LEVELS.** Our representative institutions are broken. Electeds are followers waiting for us to lead them. Too many depend on contributions from the real estate industry. Tell them you want action to stop developers from running all over us and demand real solutions. Community boards are the level of government closest to the grassroots but they have practically no funds and staff, and their votes are “advisory” at best. Demand changes to the city's charter that give community boards the resources and power to make major decisions on land use and infrastructure. Then fight to make community boards truly representative and democratic.

None of these things is easy. None of them alone can stop gentrification. But all of them build on movements and victories spanning more than a century. It is an uphill battle, but don't forget that many of the things that put a damper on gentrification pressures – for example, rent regulations and public schools and services – would not be there at all if there had not been sustained organizing. I urge everyone to get out there and find the many individuals and organizations that continue to work on these issues across the city, nation and world!

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