

Affordable housing NYC: Bed-Stuy apartments get 'long overdue' \$9.4M renovation

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News

A mix of tax credits, loans and city Housing Preservation and Development funds helped pay for the Bainbridge Street project.



Nancy Bonaparte, 58, poses Thursday with son Luis Lopez, 23, next to her newly renovated kitchen cabinets in an affordable housing building that was recently renovated as a \$9.4 million preservation project in Bedford-Stuyvesant. Photo Credit: Rajvi Desai

By Rajvi Desai rajvi.desai@amny.com June 7, 2018 5:05 PM

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A \$9.4 million transformation of four affordable housing buildings in Bedford-Stuyvesant was commemorated by city officials and nonprofit developers in a ribbon-cutting ceremony Thursday.

The preservation and renovation project, undertaken by nonprofit New Destiny Housing, refurbished 36 apartments in four buildings located at 271, 281, 283 and 285 Bainbridge St. since January 2017, Joan Beck, director of housing development at NDH, said. It also included a transformation of the backyards with benches and newly planted trees, one of which now also houses a children's playground.

The units, six of which are set aside for formerly homeless families, will remain affordable for the next 60 years, as committed to by NDH, Beck added.



281, 283 and 285 Bainbridge St. Photo Credit: Rajvi Desai

“I think this really is an oasis in the midst of a really great neighborhood for formerly homeless families and people who really need an affordable place to live, for residents who would otherwise be displaced,” said Judi Kende, vice president of Enterprise Community Partners, one of the investors in the development project.

The money for the project was raised by tapping into the federal Low Income Housing Tax Credits program, which incentivizes developers to build affordable housing by providing tax credits, Beck said. Other sources of revenue included loans from the Low Income Investment Fund and the city department of Housing Preservation and Development, Beck added.

In charge of maintaining the city’s affordable housing, HPD gave approximately \$400,000 to the project, Kim Darga, associate commissioner at the city agency, said.

“Buildings like these, especially in neighborhoods across the city like Bed-Stuy, are at risk, with rising rents and market pressure,” Darga said, adding that all four buildings are now rent-stabilized with added protections to ensure permanent affordable housing for tenants for decades.

“Nobody here has to worry about increasing rents and displacement anytime soon,” she added.

During her speech to the crowd of dozens, Darga touted Mayor Bill de Blasio’s affordable housing plan to make 300,000 apartments affordable by 2026, adding that HPD had preserved 59,000 homes since 2014 and completed projects for 16,000 homes in 2017 alone.

The preservation process not only includes maintaining the affordability of the units, but also ensuring the “financial and physical viability of the homes,” Darga added.



Officials from the city department of Housing Preservation and Development, members of New Destiny Housing and other investors participate in a commemorative ribbon-cutting ceremony to celebrate the completion of a \$9.4 million preservation project for a set of four affordable housing buildings in Bedford-Stuyvesant. Photo Credit: Rajvi Desai

For the four newly renovated buildings on Bainbridge Street, that meant everything from small cosmetic repairs in some units to a complete overhaul of the ceilings, walls and floors in others, Diana Adler, director of development and communications at NDH, said.

“When we approached the tenants and explained to them what was really happening, they were really anxious. Many of them have lived in the neighborhood for a long, long time and had heard stories from their friends of being kicked out and their apartments being renovated and then the rent goes up,” Adler said.

NDH had to constantly reassure tenants that they were getting a brand-new apartment with the same rent and the same lease and did not need to fear being pushed out, Adler added.

For the duration of the construction, which Adler said was carried out in installments of three to four units at a time, the tenants were relocated to five vacant apartments NDH had refurbished already. While it was inconvenient for many, developers tried to ensure tenants were not taken too far away from their homes, Adler added.

“There was a lot of dirt and dust. It was difficult to keep things clean” Jessie Matias said of the inconvenience his family had to endure during renovations. The support from the NDH tenant representatives and round-the-clock attention to their grievances made the experience tolerable, Matias said. His apartment got cosmetic repairs, new countertops in the kitchen and an all-electric appliance line, he added.

For Nancy Bonaparte, who has lived in one of the refurbished buildings for nine years, it had gotten “really, really bad,” with faulty piping, multiple leaks, a mice infestation and old kitchen cabinets, before the renovations began. The apartment had failed inspections five years in a row, Bonaparte added.

Displaced for seven to eight weeks to another vacant apartment on a floor below, Bonaparte said the construction, while a nuisance, had entirely changed the atmosphere of her home. The walls, floors, bathroom, and even doors, were completely transformed, she said.

“They did such a good job,” Bonaparte, who is retired from working in the school bus industry, said. “It was long, long overdue. Everything is good now.”

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