The neighborhoods of the Northwest Bronx have changed dramatically since our creation in 1983, as have the ways in which University Neighborhood Housing Program (UNHP) works to achieve our affordable housing mission.

Despite the many positive changes brought about by the renovation of vacant buildings and the new families that have come to live in our neighborhoods, the need for affordable housing remains critical in our communities. Nearly three-fourths of households in the Northwest Bronx earn a wage or salary income but almost half of all families earn less than $25,000 a year. The rise in multifamily sales prices is not a result of improvements to the buildings or an influx of higher income residents; our neighborhoods rank among the highest in the City for serious housing code violations in multifamily buildings and the Bronx remains the Borough with the lowest per capita income.

UNHP has continued to meet the challenges of creating and preserving affordable housing by developing new strategies through our Fordham Community Action Plan (FCAP) partnership with our neighborhood partner, the Fordham Bedford Housing Corporation (FBHC). Since 2002, the FCAP partnership has identified and addressed the wide range of housing needs and issues for neighborhoods in the heart of the Northwest Bronx, and has become the blueprint for our lending, organizing and technical assistance work.

Lending to create affordable housing through our low interest loan funds has been a cornerstone of our work for 18 years. A combination of UNHP technical assistance and acquisition financing has played the key role in the preservation, purchase and renovation of 53 multifamily buildings in the Northwest Bronx. UNHP’s low interest and rehabilitation lending have assisted an additional 2100 units of affordable housing. UNHP is a U.S. Treasury certified Community Development Financial Institution with eleven investments from financial and religious institutions totaling over one million dollars.

In November 2005, UNHP funded the installation of heat computers in 13 multifamily buildings through the UNHP Green Loan Fund. The approximately $60,000 in loans will help these nonprofit owned buildings hold fuel costs down at a time when the price of fuel is soaring. UNHP has used Green Loans to fund roof replacements, boiler repair and other work that will control or reduce operating expenses related to fuel usage.

Under FCAP we have lent $250,000 to FBHC to assist in the purchase of a 13 unit single room occupancy (SRO) building and the rehabilitation of a 9 unit vacant building on Webster Avenue (see photos on left). UNHP also provided technical assistance to FBHC on a new construction project to be known as Jacob’s Place, named after the late charismatic community leader Astin Jacobo. Jacob’s Place combines ground floor space for early childhood education with 63 units of affordable housing.

2241 Webster Avenue, although small, is important as it continues our joint efforts with Fordham Bedford Housing Corporation to improve the Webster Avenue Corridor and incorporates many environmentally friendly features. Among these “green” elements are hardwood bamboo floors, Energy Star Appliances and a green (planted) roof that helps to insulate the building, reduces rain water runoff and helps to improve air quality.
UNHP has developed a comprehensive strategy to identify and assist at-risk homeowners, prevent foreclosures and reclaim vacant homes for low income families. UNHP has created a database to track local homeowners who have borrowed more than the value of their home or owe back taxes in order to perform targeted outreach. In October 2005, UNHP held a Homeowner Resource Fair to provide assistance to local homeowners. Ten groups showcased programs that ranged from home repair and weatherization to foreclosure prevention and senior aid. UNHP continues to work with other Bronx and citywide nonprofits to monitor a Homeowners Protection Program phone hotline.

UNHP has also been working to reclaim federally insured foreclosed homes in our community. Based on UNHP research that indicated a high number of these foreclosures in our community, meetings with HUD and our partners (Fordham Bedford Housing Corporation, Enterprise, Fannie Mae, National Training and Information Center, HPD and Cypress Hills CDC) were held in 2003. On November 22, 2005, HPD, HUD and Restored Homes (a new nonprofit created through UNHP in response to possible foreclosures and deteriorating multi-family building conditions; the UNHP Building Indicator Project (BIP). The BIP tracks the multifamily lending of leading Bronx mortgage lenders and its database consists of more than 2500 buildings. The BIP database is a research and organizing tool that uses violation and lien data to identify properties that warrant further review by the owner and lender. UNHP has been meeting with Bronx lenders to share our research on their portfolios and discuss at-risk properties.

In November and December 2005 Deputy Director Greg Jost provided training to 50 participants from financial institutions and community groups to develop their own research for their neighborhoods at a hands-on training to identify problem buildings in New York City.

Vacant HUD owned homes in the Northwest Bronx like the ones pictured above would qualify for the newly announced Asset Control Area (ACA) Program. Under the ACA program, 300 HUD foreclosed homes will be sold at 50% of their appraised value to Restored Homes, which will in turn renovate the homes in coordination with a local sponsor for resale at affordable prices. In order to combat the high real estate prices in New York, HUD will include 60 homes for a dollar apiece to further reduce the final sales prices of ACA homes. This announcement is gratifying because the program will create real homeownership opportunities for low income families, and it confirms that a combination of UNHP targeted research and organizing has brought attention and resources to this affordable housing issue.
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Rising Values in a Highly Subsidized Market Forum

Rising Values forum panelists (pictured above are from l. to r.) Jim Buckley, Dan Houlihan of NY Appraisal, Elaine Calos of HPD, Elliot Hobbes of JPMorgan Chase Community Development Group, and Daniel White from Congressman Jose Serrano’s Office reacted to and discussed the data presented at the forum on sales prices, operating income, demographics, subsidies and other market factors. Also discussed was the future of the Section 8 rent subsidy program, which is highly concentrated in the Northwest Bronx, as well as lending initiatives in NYC to support affordable housing and new City programs designed to support the development of affordable housing in a marketplace with rising values. The forum was moderated by Guillermo Franco from Deutsche Bank, and the data was compiled and presented by UNHP Deputy Director Gregory Jost. Joseph Muriana, UNHP Board President, dedicated the forum to the memory of Mike Crawford, a long time advocate of community development and affordable housing preservation, who passed away in early 2005.

Website
UNHP’s award winning online Community Resource Guide (CRG) continues to guide users to a variety of sites where they can gather demographic, financial and other useful community information. University Neighborhood staff continues to update CRG with relevant links and new maps. UNHP has provided assistance to groups citywide using the site and has used the crg in-house to track multifamily building conditions and the status of private homes. CRG can be accessed at www.unhp.org/crg.html.