

EDITORIAL

# When it comes to freeing up housing, city must do more than look for volunteers

As asylum seekers pour into the city, sent here from the southern border, a renewed spotlight is shining on the capacity limits of the local shelter system. Freeing up shelter space for migrant families requires moving those in the system into more permanent housing that they can afford and that will provide them with appropriate social services to keep them from cycling back through the system.

As *Crain's* reported last week, Adolfo Carrión Jr., commissioner of the Department of Housing Preservation and Development, sent a letter to affordable housing developers Oct. 7, asking them to

“We are asking you to remove your affordable units from the housing lottery and offer them up for homeless placements,” Carrión wrote. “We ask you to make this new commitment on top of any homeless set-aside requirement, as a voluntary contribution to this humanitarian crisis.”

Two developers *Crain's* spoke to seemed amenable to the plan.

“This is definitely easier said than done,” said one, Aaron Koffman, president of the Hudson Cos. “But it’s doable.”

But here’s the thing: For better or worse, the development of affordable housing is a business. The expectation that developers and landlords should voluntarily change the way they do business is shortsighted.

What would be better is a forward-looking plan that actually addresses New York’s affordable housing needs in

the long term. Because the current migrant crisis did not create a need to shepherd homeless New Yorkers out of the shelter system and into homes they can afford.

Earlier this year New York state let its 421-a tax incentive for



affordable housing construction expire. One of the main criticisms of the program was that the housing it created wasn’t actually affordable for residents with a lower income. Instead of reforming the program, the state chose to throw the baby out with the bathwater. And now, when shovels could be hitting the ground to help stem the affordability crisis, lawmakers are asking for volunteers willing to forgo profits because it would be the right thing to do.

Hopefully after Election Day and during the upcoming legislative session, lawmakers put renewed focus on finding a suitable replacement for 421-a, although some initial *Crain's* reporting shows this could be a long shot. But giving developers an incentive to build affordable housing will carry us past the present migrant crisis and into a future in which everyone has access to a home across income levels, no matter where they’re from. ■

## HOPEFULLY LAWMAKERS PUT **RENEWED FOCUS** ON REPLACING **421-A**

take part in a voluntary program to move eligible individuals out of the shelter system and into affordable housing by raising the number of units they reserve each year for homeless New Yorkers in their buildings.