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## MEMO

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To: Democratic Mayoral Nominee Eric Adams

From: Brendan Cheney, Director of Policy and Communications, New York Housing Conference, on behalf of United for Housing ([Brendan.cheney@thenyh.org](mailto:Brendan.cheney@thenyh.org); 646-627-6262)

### United for Housing: Transition Principles and Recommendations

United for Housing is a coalition of more than 90 organizations that came together to draft [consensus recommendations](#) for housing policy and investment for New York City's next administration. Grounded in data and research, supported by the experience of practitioners and voices from neighborhoods around the city, the coalition's comprehensive set of recommendations are designed to shape housing policy for the next decade.

As the next mayor of New York City, you will be facing a housing crisis that has been growing for decades, with 77,900 people homeless in New York City and 51% of very low income renters pay more than half their income in rent. Experts agree this may be our last chance to tackle the housing crisis before it grows beyond our control.

After your election, you and your transition team will begin planning for your new administration. The recommendations and actions of the transition will set the tone and the stage for your mayoralty, including helping to shape the next housing plan and housing policy for the next decade. The city needs a new housing plan, and we want to help you produce that plan with the United for Housing recommendations forming the basis of that plan.

United for Housing offers our broad coalition and expertise and ability to analyze data, summarize issues, and bring stakeholders together to help you as you prepare to take office. We have expertise and leaders in housing, community development, homelessness, criminal justice, healthcare, real estate, finance and other relevant fields and includes for-profit and nonprofit developers, advocates, social service providers and much more. We stand ready to help you identify the best possible candidates for agencies that affect housing and homelessness and we can provide valuable advice for a new mayoral administration.

As you lead the transition and consider administration leadership, now is the time to build housing into the DNA across all sectors in order to successfully tackle the housing crisis. This can be accomplished in the following 5 ways:

- 1. Commit to Doubling Housing Spending and Overall Principles:** We appreciate your commitment to United for Housing's Guiding Principles and to our recommendation to spend \$4 billion per year for housing capital. **Before you appoint anyone to senior staff positions, they also need to commit to the \$4 billion in housing capital and the guiding principles.** The guiding principles – addressing systemic racism, prioritizing public housing preservation in the housing plan, expanding housing supply, improving affordability for the lowest-income New Yorkers and reducing homelessness – ensure that your housing plan is starting from a strong foundation and will be focused on addressing the real housing needs in the city. And by doubling housing spending to \$2.5 billion for HPD affordable housing and \$1.5 billion for NYCHA, you will have an achievable but ambitious funding to address the housing crisis.
- 2. Create Deputy Mayor for Housing and Homelessness:** United for Housing recommended that the next mayor create a new historic deputy mayor of housing and homelessness. This is the only way to truly align the missions

so that housing is serving as tool to end homelessness.

3. **Interagency Coordination:** Many of the housing issues the new mayor will face are not siloed in one agency but instead are touched by many agencies spread across different deputy mayor portfolios. For example, affordable housing production is conducted by HPD and HDC, but is affected by NYCHA, HRA, DCP, DOB, FDNY, DEP, DOT, DFTA, OMB. Multiple agencies house people experiencing homelessness, including the DHS, HRA, DYCD, and HPD, and other agencies interact with people experiencing homelessness, including DFTA, DOHMH, DOE, DOP, DOC and HHC and finally, other agencies affect shelter services, including MOCS and OMB.

The next mayor will need to organize the administration and hire top personnel so that agencies truly work together to address the housing and homelessness crisis. Therefore, your transition needs to seek leaders that will oversee or participate in interagency processes that share information and seek input from the public in order to best coordinate and tackle these crises that have outlasted all previous mayors.

The city currently has an interagency task force on homelessness – the Interagency Homelessness Accountability Council – but it has not meaningfully improved interagency coordination. The next administration should ensure that this task force has mutual goals for affordable housing production and usage and for homeless reductions across agencies and therefore works to address barriers and coordination needs, utilizes data to track progress, and ensures transparency and takes public input and partnership with nonprofits, advocacy groups and directly impacted persons.

Agencies that affect affordable housing production need to coordinate to ensure that they are helping and not slowing affordable housing production. The Affordable Housing Unit at the Development HUB at the DOB has staff dedicated to ensuring affordable housing production is not impeded and this should be replicated at other agencies like FDNY and others.

It will also be critical to ensure the Office of Management and Budget understands the housing plan, defers as much discretion as possible to HPD and is a partner in advancing the housing plan and works collaboratively in appropriately structured oversight. In recent years there has been overreach from OMB that has slowed down housing production or added needless scrutiny to programmatic decisions.

4. **Support for transparency and metrics:** We are excited that you have been a vocal supporter of transparency and metrics. These tools will be as important in housing and homelessness as in any other policy area. They will ensure that the programs are working and improving affordability. United for Housing has published a set of metrics that go beyond the typical reliance on a big affordable housing unit count and instead use data that will show whether the new plan is addressing the myriad housing challenges facing New Yorkers. Leadership in the new administration must show a commitment to transparency and accountability overall and to working to track and publish metrics looking at the city's housing crisis, including those recommended by United for Housing.
5. **Leveraging Institutional Knowledge and Continuity of Effective Programs:** The new administration should take a clear-eyed look at which policies have worked, which policies have worked but can be improved, and which have not worked and need to be eliminated or greatly changed. The United for Housing coalition's 90 partners have expertise and knowledge about existing programs and their effectiveness and can help the new administration make sure to keep successful programs.

The new administration should also be prepared to retain and listen to some of the high-level staff currently serving City agencies. Prior administrations have sometimes come into agencies and cleaned out top-level staff. This can lead to an agency losing important institutional knowledge, can cause lapses in progress, and lacking enough expertise to keep the agency running soundly enough to make necessary changes. Retaining specific high-level staff will allow the new administration to better manage the agency while making the big changes it wants to implement.

### **Senior leadership in the new administration**

Selecting the senior leadership team is among the most important decisions you will make. Deputy mayors and commissioners will be responsible for pursuing your vision while also operating large agencies with hundreds of staff and hundreds of millions or billions of dollars in budget authority. Selecting the right people is extremely important. United for Housing stands ready to advise on filling in the new administration based on our collective expertise on housing and homelessness issues and in working with all of the related agencies. Below we have included our principles and qualifications for selecting senior leadership.

**Deputy Mayor of Housing and Homelessness:** United for Housing recommends that there be one deputy mayor that oversees both affordable housing and homelessness policy. This is the only way to truly align the missions so that housing is serving as tool to end homelessness. The new deputy mayor must have a demonstrated commitment to addressing racism, housing insecurity and homelessness and improving NYCHA, including be fully committed to using housing to fight the homelessness crisis. He or she must also have experience with affordable housing and homeless services policy, NYCHA, HPD, and DSS regulations and have a demonstrated record of bringing separate offices, agencies or constituencies together around a common goal.

**Commissioner, Department of Housing Preservation and Development:** The next HPD commissioner must have a demonstrated commitment to the principles laid out above to tackle racism, housing insecurity and homelessness and improving NYCHA. But in order to achieve the goals laid out under those principles, the next commissioner must have the experience to make the necessary changes of this large agency. The next commissioner must have operational experience in affordable or supportive housing organizations or in government agencies with a history of improving programs and an ability to work across agencies. Additionally, they must have experience working with low-income communities and those impacted by housing insecurity, and a strong understanding of housing finance. Finally, the next commissioner must work with the mayor to commit funding and expedite the hiring process to restore HPD staffing levels to full headcount.

**Commissioner, Department of Social Services:** The next Social Services Commissioner will be overseeing two extremely large agencies – the Department of Homeless Services and the Human Resources Administration. In addition to supporting our principles, he or she should have government and nonprofit experience and have operational expertise and management experience. This agency will need several competent leaders and a clear chain of command. In addition, he or she will need to understand the current regulatory framework if they are going to make meaningful changes. Finally, the new commissioner must commit to lowering the bureaucratic barriers for people that are experiencing homelessness or unstable housing need to go through in order to get assistance.

**President, Housing Development Corporation:** New York City's Housing Development Corporation is an integral part of the city's affordable housing production. If you choose to replace the current president of HDC, who is a valuable and knowledgeable affordable housing leader, the next president must support the principles of United for Housing while

also having a deep knowledge of housing financing in order to help the new administration use funding most efficiently to get as much affordable housing production as possible.

**Commissioner, Department of City Planning:** DCP has a large impact on affordable housing production as well as market rate housing in the city. The next commissioner must be ready to fight for affordable housing production in all neighborhoods and to fight for upzonings in neighborhoods that are predominantly white and wealthy to combat the decades of racist policies that have kept black and brown communities from high opportunity areas. These tools are imperative to help increase production of affordable housing and more importantly, to make our housing more equitable and reverse our history of exclusion and discrimination. The next leader must also be open to changing current zoning codes to maximize opportunities for development and preservation of existing housing and cost-effective conversions of basements and hotels.

**Commissioner, Department of Buildings:** The next Buildings Department commissioner must commit to take steps to help affordable housing construction be more efficient and completed more quickly, including supporting and strengthening the Affordable Housing Unit at the Development HUB at the DOB. The next commissioner must also be open to changing current building codes to maximize opportunities for development and preservation of existing housing and cost-effective conversions of basements and hotels.

**Chair and CEO, New York City Housing Authority:** NYCHA has seen significant turnover in the CEO / Chair position, having four different people serve as chair in the past three and a half years. This turnover was disruptive and delayed NYCHA making progress on long term goals at a critical time for the Authority. NYCHA needs consistency of leadership after so much recent transition so that it can continue to make progress on the HUD Agreement, operational changes, and preservation goals. NYCHA Chair Greg Russ brought stability to the Authority and is serving ably and developing interesting ideas to solve the agency's chronic capital funding shortfall of more than \$40 billion. He has decades of experience with public housing and his understanding of the regulatory framework has led to creative and smart proposals to reform NYCHA while under a federal monitor.

Selecting a new chair would likely be a lengthy process. NYCHA is currently under a federal monitor and both the removal of the Chair and appointment of a new Chair would require the concurrence and approval of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and the U.S Attorney for Southern District of New York. In 2019 the City, HUD, and SDNY had a difficult time filling the top position, as few qualified candidates were willing to take on NYCHA's challenges. Given this instability at the top and the difficult process to select someone new, we recommend that the next mayor keep Greg Russ as chair.