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Senior housing (Shutterstock)

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Queens is at a breaking point on affordable housing, especially for seniors. At [Woodside on the Move](#), we've served this borough for nearly 50 years, from Woodside to Southeast Queens, and the one constant has been the need for more affordable housing.

One story in particular highlights the crisis. For the past few years, I had the privilege of working with a long-time volunteer who tirelessly supported our community, even through the pandemic, to help distribute food. Despite such selflessness, this person fell on hard times. First came eviction, then a move in with family, and then further instability when that relative relocated.

Eventually this volunteer, along with a son, ended up in a shelter — a situation made more challenging by an immigration status as an undocumented immigrant, as well as being a senior citizen. There was constant discrimination during a job search while supporting the son. It's a stark

reminder that we must prioritize our seniors when discussing policies like “City of Yes.”

Every day, our team at Woodside on the Move works with New Yorkers searching for stable homes, struggling to stay in their current apartments, or needing help to improve their living conditions. We provide housing services to more than 2,000 families each year, with 80% of those served being seniors.

Like many nonprofits, we could serve hundreds more if we had the resources. The supply of affordable housing simply doesn’t meet the demand. Seniors are disproportionately affected, facing eviction, displacement, and homelessness at alarming rates.

Queens has nearly [400,000 residents aged 65 and over](#), more than any other borough. Alarming, more than [14% of these older adults live below the poverty line](#), and many others are rent-burdened, especially in neighborhoods like Northwest Queens.

Seniors who have lived in their communities for decades face heartbreaking choices between paying rent and meeting basic needs. Many qualify for housing vouchers, but find themselves either unable to secure housing because landlords refuse vouchers, or entering years-long voucher waitlists because there are none available.

As the City Council debates the City of Yes for Housing Opportunity proposal, the stakes could not be higher. This initiative aims to increase housing, a critical step, but it’s not enough on its own. We need a multi-faceted approach that includes expanding funding for housing vouchers, protecting voucher holders from discrimination, and ensuring vouchers are usable in a tight housing market.

Recently, the city took an important step by committing [\\$3.1 million over four years](#) to combat source-of-income discrimination which is an encouraging start. The City Council should double this investment so that the Department of Housing Preservation and Development has the resources to hold landlords accountable. Without stronger enforcement, the laws protecting voucher holders remain toothless, leaving seniors and other vulnerable New Yorkers without stable housing. Also, we need a voucher system that works and [isn’t hampered by delays in inspections and payments](#).

Housing vouchers in New York City can feel like winning the lottery, but imagine winning a prize with nowhere to claim it. This is the frustrating reality for thousands of voucher holders. While a housing voucher offers the financial means to afford an apartment, it’s only useful if there are homes available and landlords willing to accept them. Both are in short supply, which is why building more housing and enforcing anti-discrimination laws must go hand in hand.

We must also explore new solutions specifically tailored to support seniors. Mayor Adams and the City Council should consider creating a new housing subsidy for rent-burdened seniors, ensuring they pay no more than one-third of their income on rent, regardless of income level or rent

regulation status. This would provide immediate relief to struggling seniors and enable them to remain in their communities.

New housing developments should also incorporate accessibility features and community services. Additionally, legalizing basement units citywide could create much needed affordable housing stock, and neighboring counties must be encouraged to build more housing to alleviate some of the pressure on Queens.

At Woodside on the Move, we see the struggles seniors endure to stay in the neighborhoods they helped build. The Council has an opportunity to negotiate a deal that maximizes housing, voucher access, and enforces anti discrimination laws, breaking down the barriers to affordable housing. A stable home provides seniors not only shelter, but also peace of mind, security, and the dignity of living comfortably.

It's time for New York to take bold action to ensure that every senior has a place to call home.

*Jourdain is the executive director of Woodside on the Move.*

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