

URBANISM

Efforts to address a housing crisis in one of the world's greatest cities, and a new shared path connects the east to the city to Tamaki Drive



Housing a city

New York City Planning director Carl Weisbrod on how his city plans to solve its housing crisis

Could you describe New York's housing situation?

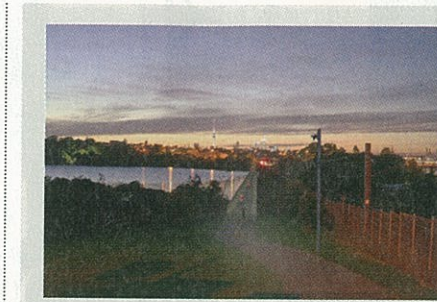
We have an enormous affordable housing crisis. Our population is at an all-time high. Two thirds of our households are renter households, and one third of those households are extremely rent-burdened, which means they're spending more than 50 percent of their income on rent. Plus we have an enormous homeless issue: we have 60,000 people spending every night in homeless shelters, and that's just unacceptable for a civilized society. We're simply not building housing fast enough to support the increased demand. Incomes aren't rising, particularly for those at the lower end of the economic strata, and housing costs are rising quite rapidly in New York City.

Your mayor was elected with ambitious housing plans. What are they?

The mayor has affordable housing as probably his number one priority. He's fashioned a plan for 200,000 units of affordable housing over 10 years plus another 160,000 units of market-rate

housing. Two years into the plan we are a little ahead of schedule. We're achieving this through a combination of means. One, we are allocating \$8 billion in city funding over 10 years to subsidise affordable housing. Two, we have created a mandatory inclusionary housing programme which requires developers to assure that 25 to 30 percent of [new housing capacity] is affordable. Three, we've changed our zoning to lower the cost of constructing affordable housing, among other things, by eliminating the requirement for parking for affordable housing – parking spaces are expensive to build and were going unused, because we're seeing car ownership decline generally in New York City. We're also changing the zoning in many neighbourhoods, increasing the density so they can absorb more housing capacity. None of that's easy. Everyone abstractly wants more affordable housing except when it comes to their neighbourhoods. And that's the challenge we face as a city.

Affordability in New York generally means rental housing. How do you provide security of tenure and affordability?



East meets west

The first stage of an important shared path is nearing completion

The first section of one of the biggest additions to the city's cycle network is about to open. The Glen Innes to Tamaki Drive shared path (pedestrians are welcome too, of course) is being built by Auckland Transport and the New Zealand Transport Agency, and will follow the eastern rail line from Merton Road near Glen Innes Station all the way to Tamaki Drive, connecting the eastern suburbs to the Waitemata Harbour. The new path will include what promises to be a showstopping section adjacent to the rail lines across Orakei Basin. The seven-kilometre path will be constructed in four sections and completed in late 2018, but the first section – from Merton Road to St John's Road – is due to open in mid-December.

We require occupants of [affordable] housing [to pay one third of their income as rent [and] that income is at various levels. We do take action against owners and landlords who don't follow the law. We think it's important for affordable housing to be integrated into market-rate housing [so] the owner can't simply walk away and say, 'I can't afford it anymore', because it does have a market rate component that's producing a profit and so affordable housing is assured. And we require that housing be permanently affordable. This is not simply a question of supply and demand. Land prices are too high, construction costs are too high so no matter how much housing we build – and I'm all in favour of creating more supply, obviously – will never be able to reduce the cost of housing enough to make it affordable for a good chunk of our population. That's why you need a cross-subsidy from the richer developers, and that's why we have to put our own public money into it.

Above left Carl Weisbrod was in Auckland to speak at the Water Edge 2016 symposium. Brooklyn's Domino Sugar Factory (designed by SHoP) will create 2,800 new apartments, 770 of them affordable.

WINNING

LightPath Auckland's pink shared path wins another award with its victory in the Transport category at the World Architecture Festival awards