

'237' Head: Luxury Lunacy

Say HA Land-Lease Plan Has a Shaky Foundation

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By DAVID SIMS |

Housing Authority Chairman John B. Rhea is once again floating the concept of leasing land to private developers to build luxury housing near Manhattan projects, sparking criticism from Teamsters Local 237 President Gregory Floyd, who called it “drastic” and rushed.

The HA is going to lease some 3 million square feet in parking lots, playgrounds and community centers near its developments, according to the Daily News. While companies taking the leases will be obligated to provide 20-percent affordable housing, the rest of their rental properties there will be market-rate.

A Small Window

Mr. Rhea has floated the concept of leveraging HA land to raise money for refurbishing the agency’s buildings before, but such an initiative will need to move quickly to be enacted by the end of 2013, likely his last year in office (he was appointed to the job by Mayor Bloomberg in 2009).

“This innovative plan to generate hundreds of millions of dollars of value will allow us to re-invest in NYCHA, where we badly need to make up for the devastating decline in Congressional funding,” HA spokeswoman Sheila Stainback said in a statement. “Strategies like this are vital to improving the circumstances of NYCHA’s residents and buildings and ensuring that quality public housing is available to New Yorkers who need it. Since announcing this plan in the fall, we’ve been closely engaged with residents, community leaders and elected officials. We look forward to continuing that outreach.”

Mr. Floyd, who has supported many of Mr. Rhea’s other initiatives, was harsh in his reaction to the report. “We need more affordable housing in New York City, not luxury apartments for millionaires,” he said in a statement. “This is a drastic plan that requires extensive public discussion and should not be done in the last few months of the Mayor’s term.”

Former City Comptroller William C. Thompson Jr., a mayoral candidate in 2009 and now, also slammed the plan as “wrongheaded.”

“NYCHA was created to provide housing to low-and-moderate-income New Yorkers, not to play Monopoly with financiers so they can build more high-priced apartments in the city,” he said in a statement. “Furthermore, this wrongheaded move comes at a time when more and more poor and working families are being priced out of the city.”

'Overhaul the Board'

He added that if elected, he would make the HA board more accountable to the city. “I will overhaul NYCHA’s board and make the Office of the Mayor responsible for appointing qualified board members that appreciate the true mission of NYCHA,” he said.

Among the locations being considered for leasing by the authority are the Upper East Side, the Upper West Side, the Lower East Side, and the Alfred E. Smith houses near City Hall.

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