

# Local 237, Elected Officials Urging Major Overhaul of Housing Authority

By DAVID SIMS | Posted: Monday, November 18, 2013 5:30 pm

Teamsters Local 237 President Gregory Floyd held a recent summit with union leaders and Members of Congress over the future of the struggling Housing Authority, calling for a forensic audit and square-one redesign of the agency's repair system.

A flawed, centralized infrastructure, 15,000 inexplicable apartment vacancies and a reportedly unspent \$1 billion are some of the issues Mayor-elect Bill de Blasio will have to tackle at the HA when he enters office in January, Mr. Floyd said.

## 3-Year Repair Backlog

"One of the problems we know about is the three-year backlog in work orders," he said at a press conference in the union's headquarters. "Let's start all over, get a list, and let each development handle its own repairs. There should be accounting apartment by apartment, manager by manager."

That was the way things were done before a centralized system was instituted by HA Chairman John Rhea, who was appointed by Mayor Bloomberg in 2009. Mr. Floyd has called for Mr. Rhea's resignation several times over the past year, saying he has failed the city's public-housing projects and criticizing his efforts to privatize and sell land around HA buildings.

"We were here before this Chairman came in; we'll be here after he's left," Mr. Floyd said. "We are forced to solve these problems, and we want to work with this new administration. A forensic audit will help us understand what money we have, what we can fix, and what we need going into the future."

He was joined by four U.S. Representatives from the city: Carolyn Maloney, Jerrold Nadler, Grace Meng and Yvette Clarke. Ms. Maloney, whose district includes the country's largest housing project, Queensbridge, said she would press hard at the Federal level for reform once Mr. de Blasio entered office.

## 'Why 15,000 Vacancies?'

"We have questions to why there's 15,000 vacancies, if there's 167,000 people that want to move in," she said, referring to the HA's long waiting list. "That's revenue that could be coming in. We want to know why that's happened. We want to know why it's been reported that \$1 billion has not been spent."

“How can you be calling for privatization, contracting out, firing people if you have a billion dollars that has not been spent?” she continued. “We used to, with each project, handle the modernization and upgrade and fixing elevators by unit. There was a change, under this administration, and now everything is centralized. With the centralized change, there was less accountability. You hear stories of people having to wait four years to get water. I mean, what is this?”

Ms. Maloney is also calling for a moratorium on the leasing of any vacant land on HA grounds to private companies. “I don’t want to take the playgrounds and picnic areas of the 400,000 residents,” she said. “We have a lawsuit coming on this and we’re deeply concerned about it.”

Mr. Nadler pushed for a deep audit of the HA’s finances to get a better idea of how to move forward, saying he had talked to City Comptroller John C. Liu and Comptroller-elect Scott Stringer.

### **‘Focus on Tenant Needs’**

“We’re gonna have a new city administration. We hope this administration is going to be more sensitive to the needs of tenants,” he said. “This is a new opportunity, with a new administration, a new City Council, a new chairman of the HA.”

The Congressman, who represents parts of Manhattan and Brooklyn, said he was especially sensitive to the issue of repair backlogs. “A very good way of destroying a housing stock is not to repair it, is to let the mold grow and continue. This is intolerable.”

Mr. de Blasio is expected to replace Mr. Rhea, and slammed Mayor Bloomberg’s approach to the HA on the campaign trail. In October, he told the Daily News editorial board that the agency’s issues were “a fundamental problem of management” and that he had a “mayoral control mindset vis-à-vis public housing.”

He will replace Mr. Rhea, a former investment banker with Lehman Brothers, with “someone who has been deeply involved with housing issues in the public sector,” he said.

He also opposes the Bloomberg administration’s approach to leasing HA space to private developers—with the possibility some of it will be used for luxury condominiums—although he allowed that “there may well be a development plan that is believable and acceptable...but not the way it was done by Bloomberg.”