

# Local 237 President Razes the Roof While Demolishing HA Plan

By DAN ROSENBLUM | Posted: Monday, August 31, 2015 5:00 pm

As Mayor de Blasio announced the allocation of \$300 million to repair roofs at several Housing Authority developments over the next three years, the president of the union which represents 8,000 agency employees criticized his administration for failing to address safety concerns, feuding with Governor Cuomo and riding a national wave of privatization of public housing.

New roofs will reduce the water damage and mold that damages HA buildings, Mr. de Blasio said Aug. 24 at the Queensbridge Houses. Nearly 30 percent of the total funding, \$87 million, will be spent at the sprawling development, which is the largest public-housing project in the country. “What we start here at Queensbridge is going to reach all across the city,” he said.

## Problems Unaddressed

But Teamsters Local 237 President Greg Floyd said that notwithstanding the repairs, calls to install tamper-proof lights, correct plumbing issues and make the work safer for his members haven’t been heeded. Instead, he said, garbage was piling up, staffers were blamed for agency “mismanagement” and violence against workers continued.

The state hasn’t yet sent \$100 million that it pledged in March and that the Governor subsequently redirected to state legislators to allocate as they deemed necessary. Mr. de Blasio said last week that he hadn’t yet been told how the state would spread the money. “We have not received a plan, and we’d very much like to get that plan,” he said.

Mr. Floyd, in a phone interview, said the “political battle of words”—when the Mayor in late June accused the Governor of obstructing his agenda and engaging in a “vendetta”—slowed down the process. “Because the last I checked, that never amounts to a meeting, it never solves the problem



## PLANS TO INSULATE PUBLIC HOUSING

PLANS TO INSULATE PUBLIC HOUSING: Mayor de Blasio is flanked by Queens lawmakers and Housing Authority General Manager Michael Kelly (to his immediate left) to announce the allocation of \$300 million for roof repairs. But Teamsters Local 237 President Greg Floyd said the city was slowly privatizing public housing with a plan to expand Section 8 vouchers and make some of its land open to developers.

that you have,” Mr. Floyd said.

### **Cuomo ‘Reasonable’**

He suggested the Mayor deputize a member of his administration to meet with Mr. Cuomo to determine how the money is spent. “I find the Governor to be a reasonable person,” he added. Mr. Floyd also said Local 237 offered to lobby Albany and Washington D.C. for more funding but was rebuffed by the HA and the de Blasio administration.

U.S. Rep. Carolyn Maloney, whose district includes the neighborhood, said developers had sought to build in underused spaces in some developments, but not in Queensbridge. “They don’t come here,” she said. “But they’ve come to several of...the developments that I’ve been thrilled to represent and tried to take all the open space: ‘You don’t need it, we’re going to build more, not even affordable units, market-rate units.’”

### **‘Next Generation’ Plan**

But allowing private development in some HA locations is a major part of the Mayor’s “NextGeneration” plan to stabilize the agency’s finances while getting those developers to include affordable housing on the properties. (An abandoned plan by Mayor Michael Bloomberg would have opened up land to market-rate developers.)

In July, the agency released an RFP seeking affordable-housing developers to build in the Mill Brook Houses in The Bronx, and in Brooklyn at the Ingersoll Houses in Fort Greene and the Van Dyke Houses in Brownsville.

Calling the plan a step toward privatization, Mr. Floyd said the authority should first seek to collect all of the rent owed by tenants. The HA collected \$81 million in rents in December 2014, which was 69 percent of the total owed. In the first quarter of this year, rent-collection rates in the HA rose to 78 percent, according to the HA, which is trying to boost collections.

### **Other Efficiencies**

Mr. Floyd also said the authority should push its occupancy rate higher, develop a comprehensive way to deal with repairs and manage its staff more efficiently. (The HA said it has a vacancy rate of 1 percent, but a recent audit by the City Comptroller questioned its tracking methods.)

Mr. Floyd said the city was mimicking a national trend toward privatization of public housing as happened in Philadelphia, San Francisco and New Orleans. “They’re getting out of the public-housing business slowly and they set the stage for that to happen within the next 10 years, and they’re not talking about it,” he said.

He pointed to the conversion of some units at the Ocean Bay Apartments to Section 8 and as many

as 6,380 scattered units over the next decade. The HA was criticized by some lawmakers, including Manhattan Borough President Gale Brewer, in February for a sudden transfer of 875 subsidized units to a management company.

The HA didn't immediately respond to a request for comment, but since the plan was released in May, officials have said opening sites for development and transferring 1,000 central-office employees is needed to keep the agency financially stable given a loss of state and Federal funding over the last 20 years. "We're going to make sure that any facilities that people have—whether it's parking, playground, whatever—at a development are made whole, even if it means someplace else in the development," the Mayor said.

### **'Buying Them With Pizza'**

Mr. Floyd also criticized a charm offensive by HA Chairwoman Shola Olatoye to pitch the plan to the 400,000 HA residents. "The Chairwoman is going around having a pizza party with the tenants, trying to con them into believing that she's going to do the very best job for them; meanwhile she's planning to privatize their homes," he said.

Also last week, State Comptroller Thomas DiNapoli released an audit that criticized the state Homes and Community Renewal division, for failing to properly monitor \$42 million for repairs at the Marlboro Houses in Brooklyn and \$8 million at other developments. It also said that the HA didn't get enough information from contractors to justify changes that drove up the cost of repairs.