

City Councilmembers introduce strong affordable housing ordinance in Jersey City

Written by Administrator
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Jersey City, N.J. (File photo)

Effort will protect residents from

gentrification by requiring developers

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to make homes truly affordable

Two Jersey City councilmembers have started the process to introduce an ordinance designed to protect residents from gentrification by requiring developers to build new affordable homes as part of new residential projects.

The ordinance will address Jersey City's longstanding housing affordability crisis, as developers transform a city at the center of one of the nation's hottest real estate markets with high rise luxury residences, displacing longtime residents.

"This legislation holds developers accountable while preserving opportunities for low income families to live in our great city," said Councilwoman Joyce E. Watterman.

"We've been talking about addressing the problem of gentrification in our city and its impact on families for years. Now is the time for action. We developed this proposal in conjunction with advocates and stakeholders who care about Jersey City's future. We're urging the full council and Mayor Fulop to get on board with this proposal, which will make sure that everyone — not just the rich — benefit from the investments we're seeing in our neighborhoods."

"Longtime Jersey City residents low to middle income families from Downtown to the Heights and Journal Square to Bergen Lafayette, West Side and Greenville are victims of gentrification, priced out of Jersey City. We need a policy that recognizes and rises to meet this crisis," said City Council President Rolando R. Lavarro Jr., co sponsor of the legislation.

"This ordinance brings the fierce urgency of now that is required to protect the hardworking Jersey City residents who made this city what it is today and ensures that everyone benefits from Jersey City's transformation."

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The ordinance will require developers of residential or mixed use developments to set aside 20 percent of new units as affordable to working families.

Recognizing that the poorest residents of Jersey City are having the toughest time finding new housing, it also requires developers to provide affordable homes for families earning between \$24,000 to \$60,000 annually.

The introduction of the ordinance follows Mayor Fulop's Jersey City Housing Plan, released in 2015, which acknowledges that lower income residents are being priced out.

Mike McNeill, chairman of the NJ NAACP Housing Committee, said, "Gentrification is harming lower income families of color throughout New Jersey and Jersey City is the epicenter of that. We can't have any more missed opportunities. This housing ordinance will create opportunities we need in Jersey City. As a matter of basic fairness, I hope they adopt it quickly so we can begin to get ahead of the displacement."

"This ordinance is what Jersey City needs," said Kevin D. Walsh, Executive Director of Fair Share Housing Center.

"Developers who receive generous benefits from the city will no longer be able to get away with building only for the wealthy. The law on this is strong and the ordinance can be implemented right away."

This bill would apply to all property developments in Jersey City that includes residences, including construction on vacant land, redevelopment of previously developed sites or the substantial rehabilitation of existing structures.