

Workforce Housing Coalition

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Westchester Workforce Housing Coalition calls on Astorino to keep up the momentum for affordable housing development

*(Statement by Westchester Workforce Housing Coalition
on achievement of 750 affordable units)*

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

WHITE PLAINS, NY. December 27, 2016. A broad coalition of nonprofit and business groups has called upon County Executive Robert Astorino to continue the push for affordable housing in higher opportunity suburban towns, despite the county having reached the goal of 750 units required by the federal Consent Decree.

“In a county with nearly the same amount of land as all five boroughs combined, we should not be content with doing 107 affordable units a year for seven years,” said Alexander Roberts, co-founder of the Coalition. “This doesn’t even scratch the surface of what’s needed.”

The county executive fought the 2009 Consent Decree reached between the County and HUD over its goal of taking on home rule and “exclusionary zoning,” in which high income towns restrict nearly all development to expensive single-family housing. Astorino called the attempt to provide more housing choices in the overwhelmingly white and affluent suburbs, “social engineering.”

The Workforce Housing Coalition had worked hard to get the federal government to enforce the letter and spirit of the Consent Decree but found it unwilling to hold the county accountable for its systemic goals. However, we acknowledge that 750 households—over half of which are white—will benefit from living in nice neighborhoods with good schools thanks to the court order and the county’s efforts.

According to Jim Killoran of Westchester Habitat for Humanity, “The suffering of those who can’t afford a home continues to grow and is an affront to all of us. Hiding behind laws like home rule is no excuse for failing to do the right thing, especially during this Holy Week.”

Dennis Hanratty of Mount Vernon United Tenants said, “The Settlement Order provided Westchester County the opportunity to be on the ‘cutting edge’ for racial and economic integration. We must look at the 750 units as only the first baby step toward this goal.”

The Coalition has believed that enforcing Fair Housing laws would help achieve greater fairness in one of the most economically and racially segregated counties in the United States and where children in certain zip codes receive sub-par educations because of how the lines of over 40 school districts are drawn. The source of the problem, however, is not racial, but economic. “Disparate impact,” while valid and real, is still an impact and not a cause. And so the Workforce Housing Coalition will continue efforts to address exclusionary zoning, which at its heart is local government regulation that dictates what type of housing is built, rather than operation of the free market. Today, the demand is for multifamily and affordable housing, which would be built were it not for “exclusionary” or “snob” zoning.

We have seen some progress in convincing towns and villages that allowing developers to respond to the free market need for affordable and multifamily housing results in greater prosperity for everyone. An example of this success occurred in Harrison this summer, where a town that had failed to develop any multifamily and affordable housing for decades approved 421 units, with 42 set aside as affordable, to replace two vacant office buildings.

We look forward to working with the county and all stakeholders to promote fairness and growth in Westchester, where multifamily and affordable housing are vital to our shared future.

The Westchester Workforce Housing Coalition includes a broad membership of business, social justice and good government groups, including Community Housing Innovations, Westchester Habitat for Humanity, NAACP/White Plains, Tri-State Transportation Campaign, Westchester-Putnam Working Families Party, ULI/Westchester Fairfield, Mount Vernon United Tenants, Community Voices Heard, Westchester Residential Opportunities, IFCA, WESPAC, and Interfaith Clergy for Social Action.