

RIGHT TO THE CITY-NYC VACANT CONDO COUNT



Background

Over the last several years, during the housing boom, NYC saw the rapid development of luxury condominiums; many in neighborhoods where low-income people live. Oftentimes this type of development has led to gentrification and displacement of low-income people that have lived in these communities for years. Due to the current economic crisis, many of these luxury condominiums are now vacant, while others are stalled in construction. Despite all of this new construction, the number of units that are affordable for low- to middle-income families has decreased precipitously. NYC has lost over 200,000 apartments that were affordable to low-income renters over the last eight years¹. Consequently, as luxury units sit vacant, the need for affordable housing is more acute than ever.

The Condo Count: Methodology

Over the last three months, over 150 members from RTTC-NYC organizations have been walking the streets of **298 census tracts** located in **9 different community districts** to document the true extent of the problem posed by empty condos and stalled construction in low-income communities. These districts were chosen because they are within communities where RTTC-NYC organizations are actively working and where vacant condos had been noted by our membership (please see attached list of RTTC-NYC organizations). These areas include: Downtown Brooklyn, Bushwick, the Lower East Side, the West Village, Chelsea, Harlem and the South Bronx.

To identify buildings with empty units, canvassers looked for evidence of people living in the units; 'For Sale' signs, and spoke with neighbors and building personnel. To help RTTC-NYC members locate new construction sites that potentially met our criteria, RTTC-NYC mapped out the location of every building that has received a building permit between the years of 2004-2008 within our target neighborhoodsⁱⁱ. In addition to the sites that had received a building permit, RTTC-NYC members documented any building that was:

- Residential and;
- Newly constructed; or
- Newly renovated; or
- Fully built but did not appear to be lived in; or
- NOT fully constructed and construction seems to have stopped.

In addition, RTTC-NYC, with technical support from the Furman Center for Real Estate and Urban Policy and the Urban Justice Center's Community Development Project, is collecting and analyzing secondary data about the buildings found through our canvass. RTTC-NYC will compile this data, along with the field research, into a full report that will be released in the coming months. The secondary data includes (but is not limited to) the following:

- Owner of building
- Developer of building
- Foreclosure Status
- Certificate of Occupancy Status
- Total number of units/total number of vacant units
- Total number of bedrooms
- Price of units on the market
- Number of days listed on the market

WHY IS THIS RESEARCH IMPORTANT?

Field Findings: By walking the streets in our target neighborhoods, RTTC-NYC has been able to identify vacant condos and stalled construction sites that have not been accounted for by the city, the media, or by other means.

A More Complete Picture: In addition to our field findings and secondary research, RTTC-NYC has conducted a comprehensive review of existing data on vacant and stalled condominiums in NYC. We have found the information available to be very incomplete. For example, our research has uncovered dozens of potentially stalled or abandoned construction projects that are not included on the official list made available by NYC's Department of Buildings. Likewise, no thorough review has been done to determine where vacant condos are located in the city and how many there are.

Impact on Low-Income Communities: Our research is specifically targeting low-income neighborhoods to determine how these vacant condos and stalled construction sites are affecting these communities. After completing this research, we hope to work with the city to convert many of these empty condos into truly affordable housing for the low-income communities in which they're located.

PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

601 BUILDINGS IDENTIFIED IN 9 COMMUNITY DISTRICTS

RTTC NYC members have identified **601 buildings**, in **9 community districts**, that appeared to contain a significant amount of empty units, or appeared to be stalled in construction. Preliminary data from each community district (CD) is below, along with additional data from two selected areas, Downtown Brooklyn and Bushwick, Brooklyn.

Downtown Brooklyn (CD 202):	126 Buildings	Harlem (CDs 309, 310, 311):	99 Buildings
Lower East Side (CD 303):	116 Buildings	South Bronx (CDs 101, 103):	93 Buildings
Bushwick (CD 204):	108 Buildings	W. Village/Chelsea (CDs 302, 304):	59 Buildings

DOWNTOWN BROOKLYNⁱⁱⁱ

- Poverty Rate of 22%
- 17% of residents make less than \$18,302
- 6.6% of residents are unemployed
- Median Monthly Rent \$1,007
- Notice of Foreclosure Rate is 14.9 (per 1,000 1-4 family properties)
- Average price of a condo/co-op or house: \$666,250

BUSHWICK, BROOKLYN

- Poverty Rate of 32%
- 32% of residents make under \$18,302
- 8% of residents are unemployed
- Median Monthly Rent \$795
- Notice of Foreclosure Rate is 57.8 (per 1,000 1-4 family properties)
- Average price of a condo/co-op or house: \$405,959

RTTC-NYC'S CONDO COUNT IN DOWNTOWN BROOKLYN: 126 BUILDINGS

RTTC NYC members canvassed 34 census tracts in community district 202, which includes the neighborhoods of Downtown Brooklyn, Brooklyn Heights and Fort Greene. Through this canvass, RTTC NYC members identified 126 residential buildings that appeared to contain a significant amount of empty units, or appeared to be stalled in construction. Below is additional information about some of the buildings identified through our canvass^{iv}:

189 Schermerhorn, Be@Schermerhorn

Number of Units:	246
Vacancy Rate:	Over 93%
Time on Market:	Over 1 year
Average Price:	\$436,000

230 Ashland Place: Forte

Number of Units:	108
Vacancy Rate:	over 60%
Time on market:	Over 2 years
Average Price:	\$979,100

RTTC-NYC'S CONDO COUNT IN BUSHWICK, BROOKLYN: 108 BUILDINGS

RTTC NYC members canvassed 36 census tracts in community district 204 in Bushwick, Brooklyn. Through this canvass, we identified 108 residential buildings that appeared to contain a significant amount of empty units, or appeared to be stalled in construction. Notably, although the Department of Buildings only lists 4 buildings on its list of stalled construction in Bushwick, RTTC NYC members found 48 developments that appeared to be in various stages of stalled construction.

979 Willoughby Street

Total Units:	15
Vacancy Rate:	93%
Time on Market:	Over 1 Year
Average Price:	\$507,750

326 Melrose Street

Total Units:	10
Vacancy Rate:	90%
Time on Market:	4 months
Average price:	\$325,000

ⁱ Fernandez, Manny. "As City Adds Housing for Poor, Market Subtracts it." New York Times 14 October 2009.

ⁱⁱ Data provided by the Furman Center for Real Estate and Urban Policy.

ⁱⁱⁱ Demographic information about Downtown Brooklyn and Bushwick, Brooklyn was gathered from the Furman Center's *State of New York City's Housing and Neighborhoods, 2008*, available at <http://furmancenter.org/research/sonychan/2008-report>.

^{iv} Information provided about buildings in Downtown Brooklyn and Bushwick Brooklyn was collected from data available on NYC Department of Finance's Real Property Assessment Database, 2008 and www.streeteasy.com.