



New York City Comptroller
Scott M. Stringer

NEWS

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COMPTROLLER STRINGER AUDIT: NYCHA RENOVATIONS KEEP APARTMENTS VACANT FOR AN AVERAGE OF SEVEN YEARS

*Eighty Apartments Left Vacant For Over Ten Years
Another Seventy-Nine Left Vacant For Seven To Ten Years
Additional Eighty-Two Vacant For At Least Three Years*

**Major repair and renovations take apartments off the market an average of 2,605 days;
over \$8 million in estimated lost rent**

New York, NY—An [audit](#) released today by New York City Comptroller Scott M. Stringer found that New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) keeps apartments off the rent rolls for an average of 7 years while doing major repairs. A total of 80 apartments have been left vacant for over a decade, and another 161 apartments have been empty for between three and ten years. In addition, while the Authority claims to have 2,342 vacant apartments, the audit made clear that NYCHA's figures were estimates at best, with some of the units actually occupied by squatters and other City agencies.

"The fact that NYCHA has left 80 apartments vacant for over a decade, and another 161 apartments sitting empty for between three and ten years, is simply unacceptable," Comptroller Stringer said. "The more than 270,000 New Yorkers who are waiting for housing deserve much better treatment than that. It's well past time for NYCHA to start getting it right."

Auditors examined how well NYCHA monitored and tracked vacant 'off-roll' and 'on-roll' apartments throughout 328 housing developments from July 2012 through April 2015.

Off-Roll Apartments

NYCHA categorizes off-roll apartments as being unoccupied for 'an extended period of time.'

- As of September 2014, NYCHA had 1,366 off-roll, vacant apartments, according to the Authority.
- 312 of these apartments had been removed from rent rolls for 'repairs or major improvements,' and had been left vacant for an average of 2,605 days.
 - The audit team found that 241 of the apartments meant to be undergoing 'repairs or major improvements' had been vacant for three years or more as of September 2014. Keeping those 241 apartments vacant has cost the City an estimated \$7.7 million in uncollected rent.

- The audit found that, in many cases, apartments remained vacant long after repairs were completed.
 - For example, some apartments were vacated for elevator repairs. But even after repairs had been made, those apartments remained off the rent roll for an average of 288 days. The cost of failing to promptly re-rent apartments due to elevator repair at 58 affected apartments at the Ravenswood and Wagner developments alone topped an estimated \$219,000 in uncollected rent.

On-Roll Apartments

NYCHA categorizes on-roll apartments as occupied or being turned over to a new tenant. NYCHA's goal is to turn over vacated on-roll apartments in 40 days.

- As of September 2014, NYCHA had 976 on-roll, vacant apartments, according to the Authority.
- Of 115 apartments sampled, 88 were vacant for longer than 40 days, with an average vacancy period of 116 days.
- According to the audit team's calculations, keeping those 88 apartments vacant cost the City an estimated \$131,000 in foregone rent.

Apartments Have Inadequate Physical Safeguards

- At three apartments in the Harlem River development, lax security had enabled squatters to move in. Walls were covered in graffiti and liquor bottles were strewn across the floor at a fourth apartment in the same development.
- At the Ravenswood development, auditors found two apartments containing food packaging with recent expiration dates, a sign that the apartments were being used.

Apartments Listed by NYCHA as Vacant, But Found to be in Use

Auditors reviewed a sample of 99 apartments that NYCHA had listed as vacant, and found 47 had been incorrectly classified and were, in fact, occupied.

- 21 had actually been combined with other units, 17 were being used by NYCHA for community centers, offices or resident associations and several others were used by temporary tenants, other City agencies or private agencies for community programs.

"Knock, knock. Who lives there? NYCHA doesn't know," Stringer said. "NYCHA's ineptitude comes at a very steep price to taxpayers: more than \$8 million in estimated lost rent that could have helped to pay for repairs and services to directly benefit its residents. It's beyond the realm of explanation how years can pass before apartments become habitable. I think we can all agree that the process has to change, from top to bottom, and I look forward to working closely with NYCHA Chair Shola Olatoye as she works to improve the agency's efficiency and effectiveness."

The Comptroller's Office recommended that NYCHA:

- Improve operations to complete repairs and major modernizations so that apartments can be promptly rented;

- Ensure greater efforts are made to turn over vacant apartments to new tenants quickly; and
- Periodically monitor vacant apartments, update records on agencies and private organizations use of apartments and make sure that all rental agreements are up to date.

NYCHA generally agreed with nine of the ten audit recommendations.

To read the full audit, please click [here](#).
