

The New York Times

LETTER

Housing for the Homeless

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To the Editor:

"Tenants Wary of Clustering of Homeless" (front page, March 4) points out that New York City faces tremendous pressure to house those who seek shelter — currently more than 35,000 people per night.

Many more are precariously housed, and some 2,300 more sleep on the streets, according to the latest estimate.

The pressure to find housing is very likely to increase as New Yorkers who have lost jobs exhaust whatever savings and support networks they have. Many of those experiencing homelessness, like the men and women helped by Project Renewal, must overcome serious mental health and addiction problems if they are to successfully remain off the streets.

The bursting housing bubble and the imminent infusion of federal stimulus funds present an opportunity to reduce homelessness without displacing existing tenants. Government could provide financing to nonprofit organizations to buy, at a steep discount in today's market, newly constructed or renovated buildings that stand vacant because of the developers' financial failure.

The buildings could then be rapidly converted to affordable housing with available support services that help tenants make the transition from homelessness to maximum self-sufficiency.

Edward I. Geffner
President, Project Renewal
New York, March 4, 2009