



**BETSY GOTBAUM**  
PUBLIC ADVOCATE FOR THE CITY OF NEW YORK  
*Solving Problems • Protecting New Yorkers*

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## POLICY

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## Reports

### **SCATTER SITE HOUSING = SCATTER BRAIN HOUSING**

An investigative report by Public Advocate Betsy Gotbaum  
History of Scatter Site Housing

The Department of Homeless Services began a scatter site housing program in 2000. [1] Under the program, the city pays landlords approximately \$3,000 a month to put homeless families in their privately-owned apartment buildings and requires them to hire a social worker to help families in the building. From 49 units in December 2000, the program grew to 1,932 in October 2002. As of November 2002, the cost for the program was \$72 million a year.[2]

In August 2002, DHS Commissioner Linda Gibbs said that she did not intend on increasing substantially the use of scatter site housing, since the city had already increased the number of units available by 22 percent.[3] However, at a March 2003 City Council hearing, Commissioner Gibbs said, "The ultimate challenge on this is that as long as the demand exceeds supply, I am not in the position to end the Scatter Site Program.[4]

When asked at the same hearing if she shared the concern of some observers that some landlords in the Scatter Site Program were not providing a sufficiently high quality product for the money they are receiving, Commissioner Gibbs replied, "Absolutely not...Quite the opposite."[5]

Gotbaum Sees Horrific Conditions at Scatter Site Visit

Despite Commissioner Gibbs' optimism, Public Advocate Gotbaum believes there is great cause for concern regarding the condition of the buildings used in the scatter site program.

Following complaints to the Office of the Public Advocate, in January 2003 Public Advocate Gotbaum visited 280 E. 21st St. in Brooklyn. The conditions were horrific, including rodent droppings; a burned-out elevator; no lock on the front door; no working lights in the hallways; peeling and chipping paint; trash scattered around the hallways; holes in bathroom ceilings; water bubbles in walls; and no heat or hot water, so tenants had ovens turned on and dangerously left wide open.

The numbers at 280 East 21st tell a similar story. The building has been issued a total of 1056 Housing Maintenance Code violations, including 132 Class A violations, 666 Class B violations, and 257 Class C violations. The violations list problems of peeling lead paint, heat and hot water problems, cascading water leaks through an entire apartment and mold. The building also has received 10 Department of Buildings

(DOB) complaints, 23 DOB violations, 15 active DOB violations, 11 Environmental Control Board violations and 7 active Environmental Control Board violations.

According to HPD, the head officer of the building is Greg Johnson, and 280 Realty Co is listed as the Corporation and Managing Agent. 280 Realty Association was issued a tax lien by the Kings County Clerk's office in January 2003 relating to HPD violations. At least 47 other companies share the same address, including 14 companies that have buildings with scatter site units. Six of those other buildings have had liens placed on them when HPD was forced to make a repair the owner had not fixed.

Visit Leads to Analysis of All Buildings in Program

Following her visit to this site, the Office of the Public Advocate conducted a comprehensive analysis of all buildings in the program to determine the extent of the Housing Maintenance Code violations, tax liens, and Department of Buildings (DOB) violations on buildings in the program. The results were disturbing.

Many Buildings Have Significant Number of Housing Maintenance Code Violations. The Housing Maintenance Code (HMC) is a comprehensive code of standards for decent housing maintenance, imposing duties and responsibilities for the preservation of the dwellings in the city upon owners and tenants.[6]

60 percent of the 281 buildings had been issued 100 HMC violations or more;

One-fifth of the buildings had been issued 250 HMC violations or more;

Almost 25 percent of the buildings had been issued 50 or more HMC Class C violations, the most serious violation in the code; [7]

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