
RESPONSE TO NYT ARTICLE "HUNDREDS OF CITY-OWNED LOTS ARE VACANT, CONTROLLER SAYS."

New York Times, February 18, 2016

By Scott Baker, New York, NY

It's a disgrace. Over 1,100 empty lots, many quite large, mostly in Queens and Brooklyn. The city says about half of these have problems like being in flood zones, but this hasn't slowed down development in low-lying shore areas all over the city, including L.I.C. and the Brooklyn waterfront in DUMBO. The city says there are few utilities and roads in some cases, but they've had since the 1970s when they acquired these lots during the city's "Bronx is burning" days to provide those. And anyway, these are costs to be borne by developers, like everything else.

No, the real problems arise from the city's misguided notion that it has to "subsidize" (read: bribe) developers to build on vacant lots, as the article says, in order for them to build there. Wrong. It has to untax the buildings and tax the land - maybe after a year or two grace period for a new project to be developed. This will lower the price while providing an incentive for the new owner to "get on with it."

This is enough land to make a serious dent in the homeless or affordable housing issue, and located often in areas where low income housing is both needed and an improvement over garbage-strewn fenced off lots.

Unfortunately, the city has the same disincentive to develop the land as the worst untaxed landowner. The Governor could fix that by imposing a state tax against (continued on p. 12)

March-April 2016 GroundSwell Page 11

RESPONSE TO NYT ARTICLE (from page 11)

city-owned land, but the land bank idea suggested by Stringer is better and given the Governor's hostile actions towards the Mayor and his being in the hip pocket of the developer community, I'd hate to see it go that way. Without a tax to spur development, it could sit idle in developer hands too.

(City Comptroller) Scott Stringer has been consistently on the right side of the land reform issue, going all the way back to his report on Vacant lots and his recommendation to tax them in 2007. <<