



In State of the City speech, mayor vows to make NYC more affordable

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Mayor Bill de Blasio will hold the State of the City Address on Feb. 3, 2015

New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio plans to make it compulsory for developers to include cheaper, affordable apartments if they build in six newly rezoned parts of the city, he said in his second annual State of the City speech on Tuesday.

De Blasio also said the city will triple the money it spends on legal services for tenants to \$36 million in the hope of making it harder for landlords to force out older, poorer tenants in favor of new ones willing to pay more.

"New York risks taking on the qualities of a gated community, a place defined by exclusivity rather than opportunity," de Blasio said at Baruch College in Manhattan in remarks he sometimes paused to repeat in Spanish.

He said 56 percent of rental households in New York City, one of the costliest cities in the United States, spent more than 30 percent of their income on rent last year.

De Blasio, a liberal Democrat, took office 13 months ago after criticizing his predecessor, Michael Bloomberg, for dividing the city by allowing inequality to grow over his 12 years in power. Bloomberg also offered tax incentives to developers to include affordable homes in their plans, but it was generally optional.

De Blasio has pledged to build 80,000 new affordable homes in the coming decade and "preserve" another 120,000, and he said on Tuesday that taller, denser construction was one answer. Under Bloomberg, who used similar language in his promises to "create or preserve" 165,000 affordable homes over his tenure, about 50,000 new ones were built.

Perhaps the loudest audience applause was reserved for the announcement of a new ferry service for the riverine metropolis by 2017, with trips costing the same as a subway ride.

Setting up the service would cost an estimated \$55 million, officials said later. The city would subsidize the service by \$10 million to \$20 million a year.

At least one of de Blasio's new ideas was being shot down by a powerful opponent. The mayor proposed burying a 200-acre (80-hectare) rail yard in Sunnyside, Queens, and building affordable housing on top.

"The MTA uses Sunnyside Yards as an important facility for our transportation system," Melissa DeRosa, a spokeswoman for New York Governor Andrew Cuomo, said in a statement, referring to the state-run Metropolitan Transportation Authority, "and it is not available for any other use in the near term."