

Transcript: Mayor Eric Adams Urges Albany to aid Creation of Affordable, Supportive Housing

May 1, 2022

Jessica Katz, Chief Housing Officer: Good afternoon, everyone. Good afternoon, and thank you for joining us today on this beautiful Sunday in the park. I'm Jessica Katz, the chief housing officer for New York City. We're here today because we have to get creative when it comes to solving our housing shortage. The devastation of the pandemic has touched so many parts of the city, and the hundreds of hotel rooms that have been abandoned have to be part of this conversation.

Katz: But, this is also an opportunity. Hotel conversion to housing is a simple but vital part of the housing solution. We can take these units and permanently house New Yorkers, and I am proud that our friends in Albany are pushing a bill forward to do just that. They have already set aside millions of dollars for us to repurpose these hotels, and this legislation will allow us to tap into that funding and house our neighbors.

Katz: As we recover from the pandemic, the city's needs have changed, and this legislation will give us the flexibility to meet the moment, because we should at the local level have the power to make these local decisions. Hotel conversion alone won't solve our housing shortage, but it is another critical tool in our toolbox, and it will help us give more New Yorkers a permanent home. With that, I'm honored to welcome our leader, Mayor Eric Adams.

[Applause]

Mayor Eric Adams: Thank you, thank you, thank you, thank you. You know, Rich, no one loves me like HTC.

[Laughter]

Mayor Adams: I want to thank our chief housing officer, who's just bringing a new vision and a new thought to how we solve holistically the housing crises that has been ignored for generations in our city. You don't solve a housing crisis by destroying good, paying union jobs. That is not the way you do it. As we look at solving this crisis, we must do it holistically, and our partners must be together as we move the city forward, and we continue to solve a multitude of problems that we are facing in this city.

Mayor Adams: New York City must deal with this housing crisis in a real way and what people fail to connect is that our housing crisis is connected to the homeless crisis. Historically, we have divided the pieces, but we are bringing them all together with our chief housing officer and partnering with every form of government, such as Commissioner Gary Jenkins, and looking at the homeless issue, and connecting the dots of seeing how do we house New Yorkers in a real way. Those who are capable of living independently, and those who are in need of wraparound services, we often have ignored that. We are saying, not under this administration, because the problem of homelessness and housing, they go hand in hand.

Mayor Adams: What we have witnessed, thanks to our amazing partner in the state, Senator Kavanagh and Assemblyman Cymbrowitz, they know we have the tool that's in front of us right now and that can unlock the hotel conversions. That's what it's all about. How do we unlock hotel conversions? Unlocking hotel conversions is not going after union hotels. It's going after those hotels that are creating blight, and they have created conditions in our communities that they use for so many illegal means, and those that are closed, you're unable to really convert them in a manner that we see so they can be an asset to the community instead of an impediment.

Mayor Adams: So, by repurposing underused hotels and creating supportive housing for those experiencing homelessness, we're solving the two problems that we are facing in our communities. It makes them affordable, permanent housing available to families, seniors, and other New Yorkers. Underused hotels are also public safety issues. As I move around the city, and I see these hotels that are unoccupied, unused, it is a public safety problem, and it feeds into our desire to make our city safe, and we're stating that we are not going to allow that to happen and continue to happen.

Mayor Adams: Many of these locations are often used by illegal means. Some of them have participated in shootings in our city. So, as part of our overall public safety plan and our blueprint to end homelessness, crime, and the other ills that we are facing in

our city. So, this is a once in a generation opportunity to tackle the problem of homelessness and affordable housing through hotel conversions. It's something we talked about often, and I'm just happy to have also with us Julie Menin who just really gets this, as she talks about, how do we properly use these hotels?

Mayor Adams: So, we're calling on our colleagues in Albany to pass the legislation sponsored by Senator Kavanagh and Assembly Member Cymbrowitz. The time to act is now. We believe there's a lot of energy up there. Senator Kavanagh, you have done an amazing job of bringing your colleagues along. We think the energy is there to get this legislation passed. This is the right legislation at the right time to access funds that we have been eager to utilize for far so long. Let's get this money out there in the pipeline so we can move forward and create affordable apartments more quickly and cheaply than starting from scratch.

Mayor Adams: Why rebuild a building when you can convert an existing building that is ready to be converted? Without hurting those hotels, we're going to use them to feed our tourism industry, which is a multi-billion dollar industry. We don't have to hurt those hotels. So, at the same time, we will continue to support and protect high quality hotels that attract our tourism and ensure that we can get people here to create and sustain jobs.

Mayor Adams: So, Senator Kavanagh and Assembly Member Cymbrowitz's bill will allow us to focus on hotels that do not benefit our community, and at the same time, deal with the issues that they create, and prevent the public safety, the affordable living, and an opportunity to continue to employ everyday New Yorkers. So, I want to thank our partnership, our team, and just great job, our chief housing officer, for making this happen. Thank you very much.

Audience:

Katz: Thank you, sir. Your standing up for this issue sends a clear statement that New York City is ready to pull out all the stops to finally tackle our housing shortage. Next up, I want to welcome someone who has always been out front on housing issues and a real partner across the board on ensuring that we finally solve this crisis, the chair of the Senate Housing Committee, Brian Kavanagh.

[...]

Katz: Thank you, senator. I will be up in Albany this week fighting for this bill and I look forward to continuing the conversation with you. I also want to acknowledge your assembly counterpart, Steve Cymbrowitz, who couldn't join us today but is dedicated to this issue. And now I want to introduce Council Member Julie Menin, a great advocate for housing and homelessness issues in the City Council.

[...]

Katz: And our list of housing champions here today keeps growing. Every time you hand me this mic, I'm going to remind and thank everybody for the elected officials who know that their homeless constituents are just as much their constituents as anybody else. And with that, I want to introduce Council Member Amanda Farías to say a few words.

[...]

Katz: Next up, a fighter for housing and for housing justice, you always want her in your corner, Council Member Pierina Sanchez, Housing Chair Pierina Sanchez.

[...]

Katz: Our next speaker and I have been getting stuff done for our formerly homeless New Yorkers for many, many years together, Council Member Gale Brewer.

[...]

Mayor Adams: Thank you.

Katz: There are so many things to be proud of about being a New Yorker, but one to make us all proud is how strong our unions are. This city fights for good jobs and the Hotel Trades Council is right at front and center of that. The Hotel Trades Council is leading the charge to ensure that our tourism industry comes back stronger than ever and as we do, we have good hotels ready to welcome visitors. But they're also working with us to repurpose former hotels into something that can better help the needs of the community. Please welcome HTC President Rich Maroko.

[...]

Question: How quickly do you think the window is closing on this? Hotel occupancy rates are going back up. Tourists are coming back. How quickly is the window closing to get something like this done and will hotel operators be willing to do this with guests coming back?

Mayor Adams: Yes. We're hearing from a countless number of hotel operators that they see this as a win and the industry was overbuilt, particularly in those out of borough locations where you saw that many of those hotels were used for seedy purposes. And this is a way to really stabilize our housing, our homeless, and also public safety. And so I think that when Senator Kavanagh's push with Assemblyman Cymbrowitz, I believe this is an opportunity to not allow that window to close and just to get this stuff done. And so I think we're at a good place. Albany has a few more weeks before the session closes and I believe in the time that when we are going to constantly pound the pavement in Albany, as the chief housing officer stated, we will be up there really explaining how this bill is crucial.

Question: With that zoning expansion, do we know about how many hotels this would allow into the program?

Mayor Adams: That's a great question. Still doing an analysis. I know it was predicted that we have about 25,000 beds that are available and potentially can fall in this program. We're still doing an analysis on how many. But, there's a substantial number. Even if we get, as it was indicated in one municipality, if you get 6,000, 7,000, these are rooms that are already built. And so this is just a perfect solution to a multitude of problems.

Question: Do you have any areas that you're concentrating on first? Is there anything in particular, in Lower Manhattan, anywhere like that?

Mayor Adams: Any and everywhere where these hotels are located.

[Crosstalk]

Question: This question is about last night, the Inner Circle Show. I just wanted you to clarify one of the jokes you made about the reporter and the quote is, "And I bet he never saw a nipple like this in his life." What exactly was that supposed to mean?

Mayor Adams: I had a baby bottle and the baby bottle had a large nipple. I'm sure he never saw a baby bottle with a nipple that size. Listen, this was satire. Man, I had so much fun last night. People joked at me. I joked at them. This is New York. This is satire. And I had other jokes for reporters. I didn't get enough time to do all of them, but I'm looking forward to next year. I got a couple of you guys in my sight. I got a joke for you also.

Question: Good morning, mayor. You've been a champion of crypto and said that you think that it can thrive in New York without any adverse environmental impacts. I'm curious what you make of the bill that just passed in the assembly that would place a two-year moratorium in the most energy intensive crypto mining, new permits, just for those, and whether you support that measure?

Mayor Adams: What we must do, Assemblyman Vanel has been a real champion up there around crypto, what we must do is ensure that we balance the environment as well as balance, not put in place, impediments to prevent this industry from growing, and that is my focus. We're going to review the bill that passed the assembly, to talk to our senate partners, to see if it's going to accomplish that task. And so we are going to continue to analyze, but the goal is there are too many barriers in New York that's preventing the industry from growing, and I want to make sure we don't put barriers in place that's going to do that.

Question: A day later, after sleeping on it, how happy are you about yesterday's meeting?

Mayor Adams: It was an amazing meeting of just talking with these dedicated law enforcement professionals. I'm just really pleased to have these professionals that have gone through a hard time. For eight years we sent the wrong message in the city, that as law enforcement officers were doing their job, we were sending out mixed messages. My message is clear. This is not a city where anything goes, and I'm sure they had a sigh of relief to hear their mayor say that and to understand how we operate as a partner. These are my generals that are on the ground and I heard from them. They gave me some great feedback on what needs to be done as we de-silo our city

and focus on public safety. All the commanders that were there, we met with all of the transit commanders, my inspection teams, I spent hours sitting down and letting them know that they have a direct ear to hear, how do we police and keep this city safe. And so it was a great meeting.

Question: I'm curious what your thoughts are on growing, the public advocate and the controller getting more vocal in their pushback to you. They're holding a joint press conference today. They held a few last week. Do you feel like the public advocate and the controller are pushing back against you more than you were expecting?

Mayor Adams: No, not at all. Listen, 8.8 million people in the city, 30 million opinions, for one mayor that's going to make the decision. I enjoy hearing the various voices and people who are raising, they're questioning things. We speak all the time, both Jumaane and Brad, we have a great conversation, and when we disagree, that's fine. There's nothing wrong with disagreeing. I keep saying, "I disagree with myself sometimes." There's nothing wrong with disagreeing. But the bottom line is, the people of this city, they looked at a wide range of opinions. And after looking at all of those wide ranges, they said, "There's one person we want to be the mayor of the City of New York, and that's Eric Adams." They have the right to say, "Eric should do things differently." I look at their offices and I say, "They should do things differently."

Mayor Adams: I look at everything else that's happening, but I don't have the right to tell them how to do it. I need to allow them to do what they're doing. I don't spend my time criticizing them. I spend my time having private conversations and say, "This is how I would do it." And we've partnered with Brad on a number of things and we're going to continue to do so. So when they disagree with me on, I'm cool with that. I'm so thick skinned. Anyone that sat through the Inner Circle yesterday realized that I'm just a thick skinned guy, man. I'm just a New Yorker. Okay. Thank you.

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