



Welcome Home Westchester Campaign Launched to Combat Housing Shortage in Westchester County

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PORT CHESTER—A host of business leaders were on hand for a press conference on June 24 to officially introduce the “Welcome Home Westchester” campaign, a multi-stakeholder effort to address the housing issue that has reached a crisis point over the past several years.

The “Welcome Home Westchester” campaign combines several companies involved in the home building and development of housing with economic leaders like the Westchester County Association and Nonprofit Westchester, academics and think tanks that have extensively examined the housing question, organizations dedicated to fighting against homelessness and supporting families in need, faith leaders and community advocates to drive forward a new conversation around housing in the county.

The campaign intends to focus on several key areas: Reforming the way volunteer land use boards work and re-examining zoning to produce stronger, more resilient, and more economically dynamic communities. The campaign will also address the impact that the housing shortage has had on the economy, how it increases the difficulties in tackling climate resiliency, and how it significantly affects extremely low-income renters, people with disabilities, senior citizens, large families, and the homeless.

“When it comes to housing, inaction has costs. Outdated processes in need of reform at the municipal level have costs. “The way we’ve always done it” has costs. Right now, Westchester residents are paying for all of them,” Tim Foley, CEO and Executive Vice President of the Building and Realty Institute said. “We believe that a multi-stakeholder campaign like this one can make the invisible visible, with respect to the everyday barriers to providing the housing we need, and encourage communities to make different, better choices to secure a Westchester that is welcoming to all who wish to live and work here – to our shared prosperity!”

“At the Westchester County Association, we are pleased to be working with Tim Foley and the Building and Realty Institute on its Welcome Home Westchester campaign. The WCA has identified the shortage of affordable housing as one of our region’s principal economic challenges and last year we revised our Real Estate Policy Playbook to include a separate section on this issue,” Michael Romita, president & CEO of Westchester County Association said. “Adequate housing impacts directly the availability of a skilled local workforce for our businesses and nonprofits. It is not simply that there is not enough residential real estate. It is that the cost of housing is fast becoming out of reach for middle-class families. That threatens the long-term health of our economy. The BRI has heard the call and are helping take on this challenge.”

“Economic inequality in income and wealth has continued to widen since the Great Recession of 2009. With home equity accounting for nearly 30 percent of household wealth, affordable housing and home ownership must be a priority and legislative objective for communities committed to realizing opportunity for all people,” stated Jan Fisher, Executive Director of Nonprofit Westchester. “This will begin to address the life-limiting



issues in health care, education and other critical areas resulting from systemic racism. We are proud to collaborate with BRI, government partners and other stakeholders in advancing affordable housing in Westchester.”

“There is no amount of taxpayer subsidy that will solve the problem without adequate supply of affordable housing. And the key to that is allowing the free market to operate without the discriminatory local zoning that has discouraged less expensive housing models,” Alexander Roberts, former CEO and co-founder of Community Housing Innovations (CHI) said.

The location of the press conference, South Regent Senior Apartments, was chosen as an example of the type of high-quality housing options that the county needs more of, particularly for seniors, millennials, those needing supportive housing services, and working families. The senior housing building was a joint venture between developers Lou Larriza and Michael Martino and the nonprofit organization Housing Action Council. Both partners have extensive affordable housing experience. The Village of Port Chester supported the funding applications and expedited the land use process providing the fundamental approvals, making this development a reality.

Members of the “Welcome Home Westchester” coalition hope that this campaign will help steer the conversation on housing in Westchester County and create more opportunities for conversation and positive change around this issue. Through public education of the low-hanging fruit of revitalizing underutilized downtown areas and the “new Rust Belt” of unused office parks and commercial spaces, inspiration and education of grassroots activists and volunteers, and dialogue around the extensive policy recommendations made by the Westchester County Association’s Policy Playbook and the Westchester County Housing Needs Assessment, the “Welcome Home Westchester” campaign will help place Westchester at the forefront of the discussion on affordable housing and zoning reform.