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milbank building portfolio needs assessment report

2010 september 21

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2010 September 21

Ms Dina Levy
Director - Organizing and Policy
UHAB - Urban Homesteading Assistance Board
120 Wall Street
20th Floor
New York, NY 10005

Dear Dina:

It is our pleasure to present this needs assessment report on the ten buildings located in the northwest area of the Bronx, known as the Milbank Properties. This report is a summary of the on-site observations that our team made during the first weeks of this month. We have enjoyed working with you and your team on this very important project, and look forward to continuing our relationship on many more projects to come. We hope that you have found our work to be professional; exceeding your expectations.

On the following pages you will find our submission as indicated by our Owner/Architect Agreement. We hope that you and the team will find the report informative and a strong case to present to potential property owner(s) of the portfolio, the City of New York and the tenants of the buildings represented in the report.

Please feel free to contact me should you have any further questions. Again, we look forward to continuing our working relationship between our two organizations.

Sincerely,

baer architecture group, inc.



Brian Baer, RA, LEED® AP, NCARB
Principal

**Milbank Housing
Portfolio**

Needs Assessment

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“In recognizing the humanity of our fellow beings, we pay ourselves the highest tribute”. ~ Thurgood Marshall

executive summary and methodology

Executive Summary:

These buildings have served the Northwest Bronx community for over 80 years. Built predominantly in the late 1920's, the buildings served an exploding population most likely newly arrived immigrant families and individuals. The 554 units provided the residents with quality housing within close proximity to Manhattan.

The recent unattentive property owners over the last decade or more, through poor lending policies have allowed these ten buildings that make up the Milbank Housing Portfolio, to fall into severe decay and disrepair. Many of the problems outlined in this report could have been avoided if the landlord(s) remediated the small problems when they first arose. Instead, they chose to do the very bare minimum, and many times, nothing, creating a much larger and systemic problems at each location.

The vast majority of the 554 units require several weeks and several thousands of dollars in rehabilitation and repair. With the proper planning, new visionary landlord, these units can provide quality, affordable, sustainable housing for another 80-plus years.

Methodology:

Our architectural team was assisted by representatives of UHAB in establishing connections with the tenants of each of the ten buildings of the Milbank Building Portfolio. The site visits occurred on September 1st, 2nd, 7th, and 8th, during normal business hours and into the early part of the evening. Residents of the buildings invited the team into their units and described to the team the current and past issues with their respective unit. Observations and notations were made, and where appropriate photographs were taken to document conditions in a unit. In a few cases, we were able to access the roof surfaces, boiler rooms, and rear and side yards. Conditions of these spaces are notated in this report.

Our team visited 20-25% of the units within each building in order to obtain an appropriate sampling of the unit distribution within each building and the portfolio in total.

Our team also reviewed information on each of the properties from the New York City Department of Buildings (DoB), Tax and Finance (T-F), and Housing Preservation and Development (HPD). Much of the property information summarized in this report may be further reviewed from these department's web sites.

the milbank housing portfolio

The Properties:

There are ten buildings that make up the Milbank Housing Portfolio that this report discusses. The majority of the properties are located in the Northwest section of the Bronx, located East of the Major Deegan Expressway, North of the Cross Bronx Expressway, and West of Fordam University. There is an estimated total of 552,477 gross square feet with 554 units of mixed sizes and bedrooms per building. The average age of the buildings is 83.1 years of age. There are a total of 131 vacant units within the portfolio, with an occupancy rate of 76.5%. There are a total of 3,325 HPD violations across the portfolio, averaging 6.00 per unit. Below is a brief description of each of the buildings

75 West 190th Street:

A six-story masonry exterior building with 50 residential units built in 1928. The total estimated gross square footage is 68,000 on a 12,400 square foot lot. The residential units are distributed thusly: 23 1-bedroom, 18 2-bedroom, 9 3-bedroom, plus 2 commercial spaces. There are 4 vacant units equating to a 92% occupancy rate. According to the HPD web site, there are a total of 296 violations; 75 type “A” violations, 166 type “B”, 55 type “C”, and 0 type “I”. This averages to 5.92 violations per unit.

686 Rosewood Street:

A five-story masonry exterior building with 36 residential units built in 1928. The total estimated gross square footage is 33,132 on a 9,881 square foot lot. The residential units are distributed thusly: 7 studios, 15 1-bedroom, 7 2-bedroom, and 7 4-bedroom apartments. There are 10 vacant units equating to a 69% occupancy rate. According to the HPD web site, there are a total of 271 violations; 50 type “A” violations, 178 type “B”, 43 type “C”, and 0 type “I”. This averages to 7.53 violations per unit.

1576 Taylor Avenue:

A six-story masonry exterior building with 71 residential units built in 1928. The total estimated gross square footage is 67,000 on a 12,825 square foot lot. The residential units are distributed thusly: 1 studio, 35 1-bedroom, and 35 2-bedroom. There are 17 vacant units equating to a 76% occupancy rate. According to the HPD web site, there are a total of 276 violations; 62 type “A” violations, 137 type “B”, 77 type “C”, and 0 type “I”. This averages to 3.89 violations per unit.

2264 Grand Avenue:

A six-story masonry exterior building with 25 residential units built in 1924. The total estimated gross square footage is 27,000 on a 5,000 square foot lot. The residential units are distributed thusly: 17 1-bedroom, 6 2-bedroom, 2 3-bedroom, and 6 commercial spaces. There are 3 vacant units equating to a 88% occupancy rate. According to the HPD web site, there are a total of 160 violations; 27 type “A” violations, 90 type “B”, 43 type “C”, and 0 type “I”. This averages to 6.40 violations per unit.

2500 University Avenue:

A five-story masonry exterior building with 57 residential units built in 1922. The total estimated gross square footage is 52,805 on a 14,994 square foot lot. The residential units are distributed thusly: 33 1-bedroom, 14 2-bedroom, 10 3-bedroom, plus 2 commercial spaces. There are 5 vacant units equating to a 91% occupancy rate. According to the HPD web site, there are a total of 360 violations; 66 type "A" violations, 162 type "B", 131 type "C", and 1 type "I". This averages to 6.32 violations per unit.

2505 Aqueduct Avenue:

A six-story masonry exterior building with 48 residential units built in 1928. The total estimated gross square footage is 67,000 on a 12,825 square foot lot. The residential units are distributed thusly: 25 1-bedroom, 5 2-bedroom, and 18 3-bedroom apartments, plus one commercial space. There are 12 vacant units equating to a 75% occupancy rate. According to the HPD web site, there are a total of 532 violations; 129 type "A" violations, 326 type "B", 72 type "C", and 5 type "I". This averages to 11.08 violations per unit.

2770-2790 Kingsbridge Terrace:

A six-story masonry exterior building with 72 residential units built in 1927. The total estimated gross square footage is 88,200 on a 16,875 square foot lot. The residential units are distributed thusly: 1 studio, 44 1-bedroom, 13 2-bedroom, and 14 3-bedroom apartments. There is one commercial unit. There are 22 vacant units equating to a 69% occupancy rate. According to the HPD web site, there are a total of 473 violations; 112 type "A" violations, 273 type "B", 84 type "C", and 4 type "I". This averages to 6.57 violations per unit.

2785 Sedgwick Avenue:

A six-story masonry exterior building with 48 residential units built in 1928. The total estimated gross square footage is 51,600 on a 11,760 square foot lot. The residential units are distributed thusly: 19 1-bedroom, 28 2-bedroom, 1 3-bedroom, and 6 commercial spaces. There are 5 vacant units equating to a 90% occupancy rate. According to the HPD web site, there are a total of 174 violations; 42 type "A" violations, 116 type "B", 16 type "C", and 0 type "I". This averages to 3.63 violations per unit.

3018 Heath Avenue

A five-story masonry exterior building with 86 residential units built in 1927. The total estimated gross square footage is 58,500 on a 20,500 square foot lot. The residential units are distributed thusly: 1 studio, 52 1-bedroom, and 33 2-bedroom units. There are 11 vacant units equating to a 87% occupancy rate. According to the HPD web site, there are a total of 626 violations; 118 type "A" violations, 432 type "B", 76 type "C", and 0 type "I". This averages to 7.28 violations per unit.

3215 Holland Avenue

A six-story masonry exterior building with 51 residential units built in 1929. The total estimated gross square footage is 39,240 on a 10,000 square foot lot. The residential units are distributed thusly: 13 studio, 34 1-bedroom, and 4 2-bedroom units. There are 7 vacant units equating to a 86% occupancy rate. According to the HPD web site, there are a total of 172 violations; 39 type "A" violations, 94 type "B", 39 type "C", and 0 type "I". This averages to 3.37 violations per unit.

exterior envelope

Exterior facades, it was observed that the exterior masonry facades have not been touched since the buildings were originally completed. In many cases, mortar cracks were present at various locations, including window and door openings. Some settling of exterior walls was observed, but this was an exception rather than the norm throughout the portfolio. In some instances, relieving angles were rusted through, most likely due to water infiltration and outdoor air quality. This is especially true of buildings adjacent to mass-transportation lines. Again, an exception rather than the norm. Most properties were kept clean of debris and rubbish in the exterior front, side and rear yards. However, residents at several of the buildings did mention that rodents were present externally and internally to their buildings.

Recommendation: Clean the masonry facades and re-point the walls as necessary. Assume that at least fifty percent (50%) of the building's facade would need to be re-pointed.

Exterior entrance doors at each of the ten buildings appeared to have been replaced within the last twenty years given the weathering and general condition of the aluminum entrances. In many cases, the security hardware was malfunctioning which would allow a visitor to access the building without knowledge of the tenant(s). In some cases, the doors were so damaged that they would not close and lock into the frame. In one instance, the vision panel was completely missing. Service doors were generally hollow metal assemblies and in fair condition.

Recommendation: Replace all entry doors with painted aluminum storefront assemblies. Replace the service doors as required per building.

Exterior window assemblies throughout the portfolio appeared to have been replaced at the same time the entrance doors were. They are generally speaking in poor condition. Many windows do not open or close. Many units are out of plumb. In each building, there are several units that were observed that allow water to penetrate into the wall cavity, causing water damage to the exterior wall and the residential units. Each building had several broken windows in the common spaces, as well as residential units. In several instances, the tenants mentioned that they had been waiting for over 5 weeks for the broken windows to be repaired/replaced. In all of the buildings, screens were not present in any window. Fall protection was provided in most cases.

Recommendation: Replace all exterior windows with heavy-duty double hung metal windows.

The fire escapes appeared to be original to the buildings. While generally in good condition, peeling paint and rust was visible at each instance. A more thorough structural analysis of the fire escapes should be performed to determine if an escape needs to be replaced or repaired.

Recommendation: Provide a structural analysis of the fire escapes.

The roofs of each of the buildings are in dire need of complete removal of the existing and installation of a new roof assembly. Many roofs leak due to failure of seams, or water infiltration at vertical penetrations. Many of the roof drains were clogged with debris. Many parapet walls and stair enclosures need to be re-built. In several cases, the parapet wall caps were missing or damaged, this would allow water to easily infiltrate the exterior wall cavity, or ceiling cavity at common spaces and residential units. In some instances, access to the roof is limited due to remote security systems. In other cases, access to the roof is free and available to the tenants and their visitors.

Recommendation: Remove and replace in its entirety each roof assembly. Include a contingency to replace roof framing at each building. Re-build parapet walls as required to prevent water infiltration. Replace parapet wall caps that have been damaged or removed. Provide secure access to the roof.

common space

Entry vestibules and lobbies were generally clean and free of debris and graffiti. Out of the ten properties, there was only one that had graffiti. In many cases, there was damage to the walls and ceilings due to water infiltration from windows or the units above each lobby. Stair shafts were generally in good condition, with only a few instances where a granite stair tread was broken, potentially causing a tripping hazard.

With the exception of one building where the *elevator* worked, in each building, the elevator was out of order. In one instance, it was described by a tenant, that the elevator was working for several months, until some teenagers who lived in the building used the elevator cab as a wrestling ring, knocking the cab off its track, rendering it useless. It was reported to the City and remains disabled. In several buildings, the elevator has been out of service for more than two months. Elevator violations are noted on the DoB web site for each property.

In many buildings, the *smoke detector system* in the corridors and common spaces do not function properly. There are several buildings that do not have smoke detectors in the common spaces. Emergency lighting is non-existent throughout the properties.

In many buildings, *radiators* have been removed, leaving the connection points exposed and cold common spaces in the heating months.

Recommendation: Repair and maintain the elevator(s) in working order. Repair, replace or install functioning fire alarm systems. Install radiators in common spaces. Repair as required, damaged wall and ceiling surfaces throughout. Replace damaged stair treads.

It was not observed if the power plant assemblies were in good working order in each building. Tenant discussed the presence of heat during the heating season, but could not discuss the condition of the power plant. It was observed in two of the buildings that a new burner was installed at the boiler.

Recommendation: Produce power plant condition report, and repair/replace as required.

residential unit space

The residential units in each of the buildings were as varied as the population that lived in each building. While there are extremes of conditions within each building, the vast majority of the units, estimated at above ninety percent (90%) had significant issues. As stated earlier in this report the sampling that our team took of the units totalled 20-25% of the units within each building. We attempted to look at the appropriate percentage of unit types within each building, giving the team enough information to author this report. Vacant apartments were generally unavailable, however those that we did enter were in in-habitable condition.

The kitchen of most units had a sink, stove, and refrigerator as required by HPD. In many cases, the appliances were more than 15 years of age. Kitchen cabinets were varied between painted metal, plastic laminate on plywood, or when a tenant replaced the units themselves, solid wood. Rarely were the stoves provided with a hood above the appliance. Many refrigerators were rusted. Many stoves did not have the oven function working properly. Many kitchen sink faucets needed to be replaced. While there were some kitchen sinks that leaked, this was the exception throughout the portfolio. It appeared that some units had their kitchen sink units replaced throughout the building, while other buildings had their units as original. There were less than one-quarter of the units that we visited that had insect or rodent issues within the unit. In most cases, the kitchen ceilings and walls had evidence of water damage, either from the unit (or roof) above, the heating supply line(s), or the exterior wall/window. Floors were generally in fair condition, although most had direct-glue vinyl composite tile.

Recommendation: Complete renovation of the kitchen. It would be recommended that the drywall/plaster be removed in its entirety so that the wall and ceiling framing may be exposed and inspected for damage. Should the framing prove to be damaged, it should be removed and replaced in-kind. Existing floors should be repaired, or if unable to be repaired, continuous sheet product installed. Moisture resistant gypsum wall board should be installed and painted with appropriate paint. Installation of new kitchen appliances, fixtures and cabinetry throughout.

The bathroom(s) of each unit had a sink/vanity, toilet and a tub with wall mounted shower. Ceramic tile floor, and ceramic tile behind the sink, toilet and tub/shower surround. In most cases, the walls, floor and ceilings have gone through several damaged/repared cycles that they are becoming wholesale problems. In most cases, the bathroom ceilings and walls had evidence of water damage, either from the unit (or roof) above, or the exterior wall/window. There is no mechanical ventilation in any of the bathrooms. Tenants have described waiting months at a time for repairs to occur, only to have them incomplete.

Recommendation: Complete renovation of the bathroom. It would be recommended that the drywall/plaster be removed in its entirety so that the wall and ceiling framing may be exposed and inspected for damage. Should the framing prove to be damaged, it should be removed and replaced in-kind. Existing floors should be repaired, or if unable to be repaired, continuous sheet product installed.

Ceramic tile backer-board should be installed where ceramic wall tile will be installed. The balance of the room should have moisture resistant gypsum wall board should be installed and painted with appropriate paint. Appropriate floor membrane should be installed to help mitigate any future water damage to the unit, and/or the unit(s) below. Installation of new bathroom fixtures and cabinetry throughout.

The infrastructure of each unit is generally original to the building. Heating supply lines are exposed to the living spaces. Cast iron radiators are installed throughout each unit. In some cases, the radiators have been removed (either by the previous property owner or the tenant) due to a malfunctioning or leaking unit. None of these have been replaced, leaving the floor connection points exposed, many uncapped. In several cases, the heating supply line or the radiator unit itself has leaked, causing finish and structural floor damage to the unit and/or the unit(s) below.

Electrical distribution within the units are also original to the building. All units have un-lockable breaker cabinets with screw-type fuses. Several fuse locations have been burned out rendering the service to that circuit useless. Many units only have one or two outlets working. None of the outlets are grounded. In many cases, the tenants have used extension cords and multiple outlet strips for their electrical needs. In some buildings, the front door buzzers do not work. Fire/smoke alarms are battery operated and generally malfunctioning.

There is no automatic fire suppression system in any of the buildings.

Recommendation: Replacement of the heating supply lines throughout and installation of energy-efficient heating elements in each unit. Installation of new electrical distribution system throughout each unit inclusive of fire/smoke detection system. Code compliance will need to be verified if an automatic fire suppression system will be required in the buildings.

Living, dining and bedroom spaces generally are in good condition. There are instances in each of the building where water damage has occurred at the wall, floor, and/or ceiling. This has been primarily due to a leak from an adjacent kitchen, bath, heating supply line, and/or infiltration through a window. Floors varied from glue-down vinyl composite tile to two-species hardwood strip flooring. In a few instances, an area of the floor of a room show signs of structural abnormalities. This condition is rare, but should be thoroughly investigated for its situation.

In general, most units have lead paint present. This has been noted in the violation log from the HPD. Most units have not been painted by the property owner in more than 3 years. Those units that have been painted, were completed by the tenant or a City agency. There are isolated instances of mold in each building in various locations, typically closets, kitchens and bathrooms

Recommendation: Repair floors, walls and ceilings as required per unit. Prepare units to receive new paint throughout. Remediate mold locations.

estimated repair costs

“Everybody wants the same thing, rich or poor, not only a warm dry room, but a shelter for the soul”. ~ Samuel Mockbee, Architect, Rural Studio

The estimated range of repair costs associated with this report are based on 3rd quarter 2010 dollar values. The infrastructure, assemblies and finishes throughout each building are based on HPD guidelines. Below are the per unit costs associated with the findings of the report.

living, dining and bedroom repairs	\$2,500.00 - 3,500.00
kitchen	\$9,000.00 - 11,000.00
bathroom	\$6,000.00 - 8,500.00
infrastructure	\$5,000.00 - 7,000.00
estimated interior repair cost per unit	\$22,500.00 - 30,000.00
total estimated interior repair costs (portfolio-wide)	\$12,465,000.00 - 16,620,000.00
building repair costs	\$500,000.00 - 1,000,000.00 per building
total portfolio repair costs	\$17,465,000 - 26,620,000.00

**Milbank Housing
Portfolio**

photographs

Needs Assessment



Typical radiator/floor damage



Exposed wiring in bathroom



Exterior wall damage from moisture



Exposed electrical and plumbing in bathroom



Bathroom with severe mold



Bathroom with severe mold

Milbank Housing Portfolio

Needs Assessment

Bathroom with severe mold



Damaged bathroom ceiling from
water infiltrations

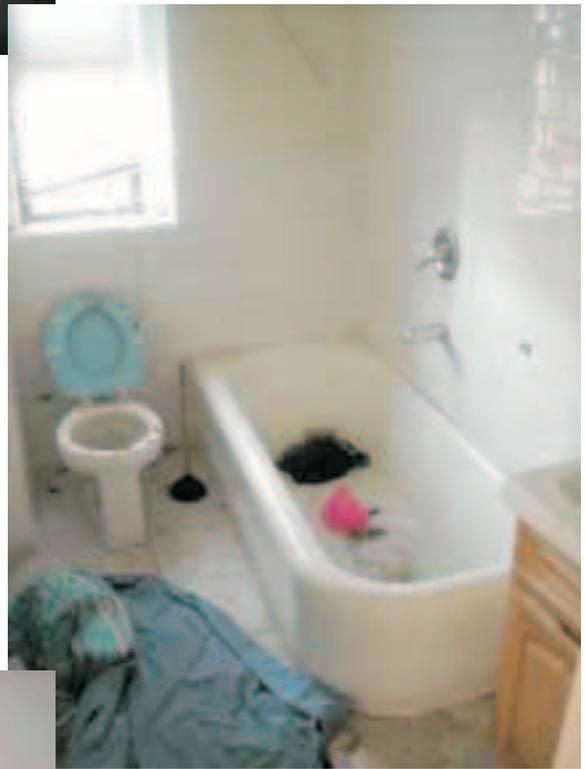


Damaged living room ceiling from
water infiltration





Vacant unit



Damaged bathroom of occupied unit



Vacant unit. The plywood is covering an exterior window

Milbank Housing Portfolio

Needs Assessment

Bathroom of occupied unit.



Bathroom ceiling of occupied unit

Bathroom ceiling of occupied unit.



Milbank Housing Portfolio

Needs Assessment

conclusion

The ten buildings that comprise the Milbank Housing Portfolio have served the Northwest Bronx community for over 80 years. The 554 units were built to house working families and couples providing them quality housing within close proximity to Manhattan. Through several poor lending policies and unattentive property owners, these properties have gone into disrepair and decay to a point that makes the living conditions for the remaining families, difficult.

With a new owner that has the proper vision for the portfolio, the appropriate funds allocated, and a well thought out rehabilitation plan, these units can be brought back to their original grandure. By doing that, the neighborhood will have 554 families living in quality sustainable housing for the next 80 years and beyond.

