



Remembering Mayor Koch

Ed Koch was a great friend to Housing. As a Congressman, he was the author of numerous technical amendments to the Housing Act in response to requests from the New York Housing Conference, staffed at the time by yours truly. He wrote an amendment to lower the percentage of income that large families needed to pay for rent and for years prevented increases. He achieved many amendments to FHA limits so the programs could work in New York. Through his efforts, single people – neither elderly nor disabled – were eligible for Section 8 and public housing. This was essential for the rescue of Manhattan Plaza, enabling low and moderate income performing artists to live there.

As Mayor, he was truly remarkable. President Reagan ended housing assistance for new construction and substantial rehabilitation just at the time when homelessness became significant in New York. At the same time, owners were abandoning properties right and left, ceding ownership to the City. Mayor Koch used these masses of empty buildings to reclaim abandoned areas that were both squalid and dangerous. His local commitment to housing was unprecedented and visionary. In 1986 he created a ten year housing plan with an allocation of \$5.1 billion. Settlement Housing Fund obtained funds to study the plan, made a few recommendations, and concluded, “yes, this can work.” His deputy mayors and staff not only created a brilliant plan, but also implemented it wisely.

His administration chose Settlement Housing Fund to own the largest renovation site – 14 buildings with 893 apartments. Since then we have added three more buildings. Bonds backed by Battery Park City revenues financed renovation. Instead of paying debt service, we were allowed to devote significant funds to award winning educational and recreation programs.

Because of his initial vision and the continued efforts of future Mayors, Harlem, the Bronx and Central Brooklyn are sound, reclaimed communities with affordable housing. Over the years the neighborhoods get better and better, thanks to Mayor Koch. Whatta guy.

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