

Full Text of Intro 48

By Council Members Mark-Viverito, Brewer, Chin, Dickens, Ferreras, Fidler, James, Lander, Palma, Reyna, Rodriguez, Van Bramer, Vann, Williams, Nelson, Mendez, Levin, Foster, Dromm, Crowley, Arroyo, Koslowitz, Jackson, Cabrera, Garodnick, Barron, Rose (*list in formation*)

A Local Law to amend the New York city charter, in relation to an annual census of vacant properties.

Be it enacted by the Council as follows:

Section 1. Section 15 of the New York city charter is amended by adding a new subdivision f to read as follows:

f. Citywide census of vacant properties.

a. The office of operations or such other office or department as may be designated by the mayor shall conduct a census each year of every vacant building and vacant lot within the city and shall disaggregate the results by borough and community district. The first such census shall be initiated no later than ninety days after the effective date of this subdivision and shall be completed within one hundred eighty days thereafter. A new vacancy census shall be conducted every twelve months thereafter. For the purposes of this section, "a vacant building" is a building which is not being used for any purpose for which it may lawfully be used and a "vacant lot" shall mean a parcel of land on which no lawful structure exists and which is not otherwise being used for any purpose for which it may lawfully be used.

b. The departments of environmental protection, buildings and sanitation and the fire department shall provide to the office of operations such records concerning the physical condition of and services provided to any building or parcel of land within the city as shall any other agency for which the office of operations makes such request in order to aid the office in determining whether any building or lot is vacant.

c. A list of the vacant buildings and vacant lots disclosed as a result of such census, the owners of each such vacant building or vacant lot and when the office of operations was first able to determine when such building or lot became vacant shall be compiled and such list shall be made available to the public in print and on the city's website. The office of operations shall also track each such building or lot to determine when it is no longer is vacant. Sources of information relating to ownership shall include, but not be limited to, records of the department of housing preservation and development, the department of finance and the department of buildings and each agency shall provide to the office of operations such information as shall be requested.

§2. This local law shall take effect immediately.

Intro 48: A Citywide Census of Vacant Properties

What is it, why does it matter, and what can I do about it?

WHAT IS INTRO 48?

Intro 48 is a City Council Bill that would force NYC to conduct an annual count of vacant buildings and lots in the five boroughs. Written by homeless people and introduced by Council Member Melissa Mark Viverito, Intro 48 will let us see just how much housing stock is being wasted by greedy landlords and city agencies. Right now the city doesn't keep track of vacant property, and the Mayor denies that it's still a problem. Counting these properties is an important first step to transforming them into housing for homeless people.

WHERE IS THE BILL RIGHT NOW?

Upon introduction, the bill was referred to the City Council's Housing Committee. Currently, ten of the fifteen members of that committee are already co-sponsors, which gives us a lot of hope that the bill will be scheduled for a hearing very soon. Intro 48 has a total of 26 co-sponsors - a majority of the City Council's 51 seats. *This may be the first time in city history that a bill written by homeless people has such a clear shot at passage!*

IS VACANT PROPERTY REALLY SUCH A BIG PROBLEM?

Vacant properties persist throughout the city. In 2006, Picture the Homeless collaborated with Manhattan Borough President Scott Stringer on a block-by-block count of every vacant building and lot in the city—and found that the total volume of empty housing units in those Manhattan properties exceeded the number of homeless households in shelter and on the street! 24,000 potential apartments could have been developed out of all those properties going to waste. Since the financial collapse of countless condo developments are stalled for lack of financing, or more than 75% empty because no one has any money to buy these luxury apartments.

For more info: http://www.picturethehomeless.org/files/pdf/Homeless_People_Count.pdf

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Because for too long, landlords have been able to get away with keeping their buildings empty for speculative purposes—and the city doesn't do a thing about it. A similar census was instituted by Boston in 1997, and the city saw its stock of vacant property decline by 67%. With the city's sheltered homeless population climbing towards a staggering 38,000 people, low-income New Yorkers cannot wait any longer for the city to take real steps to end the crisis of warehousing that has kept so much usable living space off the market.

DOESN'T BLOOMBERG'S HOUSING PLAN ALREADY DEAL WITH THIS ISSUE?

HPD's "New Housing Marketplace" acknowledges the urgent need to create lots more housing. However, this plan's "affordable housing" is for people making 80% of Area Median Income—nearly \$76,000 a year! *Like so much of supposedly "affordable" housing, the creation of housing targeted at people making this much money will lead to accelerated gentrification of the poor neighborhoods where vacant properties are concentrated.*

HOW CAN I HELP?

Call your City Council Member and ask them to VOTE YES on INTRO 48. If they want more information, tell them to call Picture the Homeless at 646-314-6423. And if they're opposed to the bill, ask them why—and then let *us* know so we can put the pressure on them! To find out who your representative is, visit: <http://council.nyc.gov/html/members/members.shtml>

Intro 48: A Citywide Census of Vacant Properties

A Cost Analysis, Commissioned by Picture the Homeless

Intro 48 is a City Council bill that would mandate an annual count of vacant buildings and lots in the five boroughs. Written by homeless people and introduced by Council Member Melissa Mark Viverito, Intro 48 will let us see just how much underutilized housing exists, and allow communities to come up with their own strategies to return them to productive use.

Understandably, lawmakers and city agencies may be concerned with the cost of conducting a citywide vacant building and lot count. To that end, Intro 48 does not mandate HOW the count should happen—meaning that the city has some leeway in shaping the project so as to keep costs down. In fact, Intro 48 does not even charge a specific city agency with spearheading the count, calling instead on: “The office of operations or such other office or department as may be designated by the mayor.”

For this cost analysis we have outlined two different courses of action, with a cost estimate for each.

COST OF INTRO 48, ESTIMATED BY COMPARISON WITH BOSTON’S PROPERTY CENSUS

Boston initiated its own vacant property count in 1997, and the city saw its stock of vacant property decline by 67%. Through our conversations with the Boston's Department of Neighborhood Development, we learned that their annual count is coordinated by one staffer, who takes a van out block by block to count vacant property. Working with the support of 8 student interns, he reported that it only consumes about 15% of his total work time in any given year. Given that New York City is almost exactly six times bigger than Boston (304.8 square miles vs. 48.4), multiplying that 15% by six still doesn't add up to the cost of one dedicated staffer—90% of a full-time associate inspector’s average salary of \$46,000.

Based on comparison with Boston, and replicating their methodology, the estimated cost of Intro 48 would be under \$50,000 per year.

COST OF INTRO 48 AS ESTIMATED BY TOM ANGOTTI, PhD—HUNTER COLLEGE DEPARTMENT OF URBAN AFFAIRS AND PLANNING

A vacant building and lot count could be executed at the community board level, with each of the 59 boards hiring student interns from fields like urban planning, to collect data that would be passed on to the city agency in charge of the count. At twelve dollars an hour, for an estimated fifty hours per community board, canvassing all 59 community boards would cost \$35,400.00 without factoring in staff supervision—which would be far less than one full-time position.

Executing the count at the community board level would carry an estimated cost of under \$60,000 per year.

These are only two examples. In practice, there are dozens of ways in which a citywide vacant building and lot count could be carried out. Given the bill’s broad support within the council, and the deep resonance of the issue of vacant property in many different communities, we are optimistic that a cost-effective solution will be developed.

Additionally, it’s important to remember that the bulk of the necessary information already exists in the databases of agencies like the Department of Environmental Protection, FDNY, NYPD, and Con Ed. Compliance from these agencies in sharing information would dramatically reduce the cost of gathering data.

Housing Bill Blocked by Back-Room Bureaucrats:

THE LONG JOURNEY OF INTRO 48

Since March of 2008, homeless people have been dancing with a handful of covert power-brokers—a “Shadow Government” of unelected lawyers and policy drones who have consistently blocked our efforts to make real change happen through a City Council bill that would address the twin problems of homes without people and people without homes.

First, Council lawyer Jeff Haberman argued that our bill was unconstitutional, since it could violate the Fifth Amendment under the “regulatory takings” doctrine. *So we fixed that.*

THEN, Jeff told us that our bill was in violation of the Urstadt law, since it gave the city too much power to impact rents, which only the State legislature can control. *So we fixed that.*

IN APRIL OF 2009, Jeff was concerned that the bill would be challenged in court by the Mayor, because our proposed Homeless Housing Trust Fund was a “curtailment of mayoral powers.” *So we fixed that.*

THEN THERE WAS ALMOST A YEAR of back and forth and unreturned phone calls about “definitions of vacancy” and “information sharing” between city agencies. Then Jeff Haberman and his boss Rob Newman told us that no bill would be introduced at all, because it “conflicted” with another bill introduced earlier by David Yassky. We pushed back and they changed their minds about that.

FINALLY, in February of 2010, the bill was introduced by Melissa Mark-Viverito as Intro 48—empowering the city to conduct an annual count of vacant buildings and lots throughout the five boroughs. In less than a month, this modest and common-sense legislation attracted *a majority of City Council members as co-sponsors.*

The bill was referred to the Housing Committee of the City Council, and we were excited that the Committee Chair would be scheduling a hearing for the bill and it would go back to the full council for a vote. After two months of silence, we got worried. We reached out to the Council's policy division to see what was happening—and learned that these same professional obstacles were “getting push-back” from the Administration, and were concerned about the cost of the bill. It was shocking to learn that Council technocrats had been sitting on the bill because the Mayor didn't like it. We had been under the impression that the Council exists as a counter-balance to the Mayor's power—instead of killing every bill he has “concerns” about. But in good faith, we commissioned two different cost analyses, one through dialogue with Boston (who conducts their own annual count), and one from Tom Angotti, PhD, Hunter College Professor of Urban Planning. These estimates ranged from \$50,000 to \$75,000—a drop in the bucket when you consider that the city spends up to \$48,000 to keep ONE FAMILY in a homeless shelter for a year, multiplied by the 37,000 people in shelter RIGHT THIS MINUTE.

Several more months of silence ensued. After calling these people on a daily basis, we were finally informed by David Pristin, the Director of the City Council's Policy Division, that *“with this legislation, this is not something we're interested in moving forward, and we're setting it to the side.”*

So we organized a direct action, asking Christine Quinn to intervene and override her staff's obstructionism. The day before the action, David Pristin called back to say that he “said some wrong things,” and that “Speaker Quinn wants you to know that this issue is important to her.”

But then, a month later, when we're about to have a press conference in support of Intro 48, we find out from one of our legislative allies that “the Speaker's office does not approve of the event,” and that she's “encouraging all council members to NOT participate.” As a result, NONE of the council members who had committed to attend actually showed up. Which makes us wonder: what exactly is the legislative process? We thought a bill's success depended on popular support—not the Speaker's whim.

In 2006, after years of demanding that the city do something about all the abandoned buildings going to waste in the middle of a housing crisis, Picture the Homeless partnered with Manhattan Borough President Scott Stringer to develop and execute a block-by-block count of vacant buildings and lots in Manhattan.

What did we find?

VACANT PROPERTY CAN COMPLETELY ERADICATE HOMELESSNESS IN NYC

The total volume of empty housing units in abandoned buildings exceeds the number of homeless households in shelter and on the street! **24,000 potential apartments** can be developed out of all those properties going to waste.

PROPERTY ABANDONMENT TARGETS COMMUNITIES OF COLOR

The neighborhoods with the highest volume of empty buildings are primarily communities of color.

VACANT PROPERTY AFFECTS EVERYONE

Every year, an incalculable amount of money is spent as a result of property abandonment. Blocks with boarded-up buildings get 2-3 times as many police calls for violent offenses as blocks in the same neighborhood without vacant property. Homes near abandoned buildings lose more than \$7,000 in value. The city spends millions providing shelter to homeless people who could be living in these apartments.

INCENTIVES TO ABANDONMENT REMAIN

Many city policies encourage landlords to keep their buildings empty, either directly or indirectly.

CURRENT CITY “SOLUTIONS” SPEED UP GENTRIFICATION

Federal guidelines for affordable housing targets households with an annual income at 90% of Area Median Income. In New York City, where AMI for a family of 4 is \$63,000, families making \$56,000 are eligible for “affordable” housing, which means they are in direct competition for scant housing resources with the working poor—a full-time minimum wage worker makes approximately \$11,000 per year, or 17.5% of AMI.

LEGISLATIVE AND POLICY CHANGES ARE NEEDED!

We need significant changes if we are going to stop these buildings from remaining empty and develop *real housing* out of them. Our core demands include: Creation of a regular citywide census of vacant buildings and lots. Empowerment of NYC Department of Buildings to declare unoccupied buildings “nuisances” on the grounds that they are “detrimental to the life or health” of the community at large, including homeless people. Empowerment of NYC HPD to levy an annually-increasing fine against non-compliant landlords in an amount equivalent to the current cost of bringing the building online. Development of a mechanism by which DHS-funded shelter residents can “opt out” of shelter and into housing, with a portion of the money currently being paid by the City to their shelter being used to rehabilitate empty buildings. Amendment of NYC Rent Stabilization guidelines to ensure that when these properties are brought back online, previously-rent-stabilized units, which typically lose their stabilization as a result of their vacancy, will revert to stabilized status.

Please check out our entire report, available on our website:

www.picturethehomeless.org/files/pdf/Homeless_People_Count.pdf

I am aware that there are many who wince at a distinction between property and persons—who hold both sacrosanct. My views are not so rigid. A life is sacred. Property is intended to serve life, and no matter how much we surround it with rights and respect, it has no personal being.

It is part of the earth man walks on; it is not man.

—Martin Luther King, Jr.

Cover design by Trinidad M. Peña. <http://www.impactdesigngraphics.com>

Potential Policy Solutions

for Vacant Property Identified Under Intro 48

Passage and implementation of Intro 48 will open up a number of opportunities for developing housing out of the vacant buildings and lots identified in the census. While it's difficult to predict what we'll find until we find it, the much-publicized failures of the HARP program are ample evidence that we won't find viable solutions to the problem of property warehousing simply by throwing money at it.

One significant alternative approach would be to use the data to pursue additional funding for developing housing and otherwise abating the problems caused by property abandonment and under-utilization. In the past year HUD had already provided \$6 billion, in two rounds of Neighborhood Stabilization Program funding, to state and county governments to help communities reverse the effects of the foreclosure crisis and assist with the cleanup of vacant homes. Last week they added another billion (September 2010), bringing the total up to \$7 billion. A city census of vacant properties would be useful as a ready source of data in relation to the foreclosure crisis and the possibility of additional Federal funding interventions.

A vacant property registration fee, which Council Member Brad Lander is already exploring, could potentially raise the funding necessary not only to cover the cost of the count, but to develop some of these properties into housing. While this could be a substantial money-maker for the city, until we have an actual count of vacant property it's impossible to project a figure for the overall net gain. However, based on the 2006 count of vacant buildings in Manhattan alone, which identified 1500 properties, and a possible registration fee of \$1200 per property (which is what other cities in New York such as Newburgh have in place), one borough could raise \$1.8 million in registration fees.

It's difficult to know exactly which tactics and strategies we can take from Boston, until an actual NYC census gives us a sense of what percentage of property is privately- versus publicly-owned, how many are actively abandoned vs. how many are actively incorporated into development portfolios with a timeline for completion of less than one year (in follow-up investigations of specific properties, we would stress that the fact that a property is already included in a development portfolio, or that an owner already has plans for making use of the property, should not in and of themselves mean that a property is not vacant, or will be returned to productive use in any kind of timely fashion... On Lenox and 125th Street, for example, an entire block of vacant buildings remained empty for thirty years while the landlord waited for surrounding properties to come on the market - and in the end, in 2006, the entire block was demolished - the resulting lot has been vacant since then). Boston's Foreclosure Intervention Team (FIT) targets areas with concentrated foreclosures and distressed properties, and their activities include expedited City tax foreclosure takings - a process that could put those properties up for sale and provide a substantial financial boost for the city.

In addition, there are many opportunities for private as well as governmental funding that would open for the city once it had initiated a vacant property census. Boston's Department of Neighborhood Development was selected in 2007 to participate in the National Vacant and Abandoned Properties Grant Program. The program awarded DND software, hardware and training to foster innovative approaches to solving community problems. With this grant, GIS applications were designed and a GPS handheld device was purchased to enhance field work during the annual distressed buildings survey. For the 2008 distressed building survey all exterior property surveys were completed using the GPS handheld device, which includes a built in camera. After successfully using the device for the distressed buildings survey, the City began using the device for monthly REO property surveys and on-going City-owned property surveys.

There is growing interest from the banking sector in financing development of vacant properties. This year, Freddie Mac and Wells Fargo sponsored a special forum on vacant and abandoned properties, in conjunction with the U.S. Conference of Mayors, at which point many exciting best practices were shared from municipal governments as well as banks. Philadelphia's mayor created a mortgage foreclosure prevention program that has led to 6400 homeowners saving their homes, whose success has depended on the heavy cooperation of banks. Wells Fargo has created a special Exclusive Remodel Express or FHA 203(k) mortgages as a renovation solution to purchase or refinance and remodel a home.

Policy proposals or projections based on Intro 48 would be premature until the bill has been passed and implemented. Data gathered in the census will give us the power to discover "why" the buildings are vacant—a piece that's currently missing, but which is integral to developing policy around why buildings are vacant and how can we move them from vacancy to units of affordable housing. What is clear is that vacant property represents a significant potential source of housing, and that cities around the country are already building public-private partnerships, tapping into federal funding, and otherwise putting new ideas into practice that return vacant property to productive use and stabilize communities.

Sources:

U.S. Conference of Mayors, "The Revitalization of Vacant Properties: Where Broken Windows Meet Smart Growth"
http://www.usmayors.org/brownfields/library/Revitalization_of_Vacant_Properties.pdf

U.S. Conference of Mayors, "Special Forum: Disposition of Distressed, Vacant, Abandoned Property in Local Communities"
http://www.usmayors.org/usmayornewspaper/documents/06_28_10/pg9_abandon_property.asp

HUD: "Obama Administration Awards Additional \$1 Billion to Stabilize Neighborhoods Hard-Hit by Foreclosure."
http://portal.hud.gov/portal/page/portal/HUD/press/press_releases_media_advisories/2010/HUDNo.10-189

City of Boston, "Distressed Buildings – Trends 2008"
http://www.cityofboston.gov/dnd/PDFs/Distressed_Buildings_Report.pdf

Cleveland State University, College of Urban Affairs. "Sustainable Reuse Strategies for Vacant and Abandoned Properties." http://urban.csuohio.edu/community_planning/publications/vacant_properties_final_10_08.pdf

Vacant Property Registrations Throughout New York State:
<http://www2.safeguardproperties.com/vpr/city.php?s=&st=NY&pp=20&t=&b=&p=0&l=20&id=&sd=1>

City Agency Data Overview

Picture the Homeless

Many people are concerned that the cost of conducting a citywide vacant building and lot count would be prohibitive. Interagency cooperation will be an important factor in reducing the cost of the bill, which is why the text of Intro 48 contains a provision requiring it. It is our belief that many city agencies contain information that will be critical to understanding the extent and nature of New York's vacancy problem. To test this, Picture the Homeless recently initiated a campaign of dozens of coordinated Freedom of Information Law requests to different city and state agencies. Initial results from agencies and other organizations include:

1,889: vacant city-owned lots, administered by DCAS

4,847: buildings with a current vacate order, according to the Department of Buildings

3,150: vacant privately-owned lots, from the Office of Environmental Remediation.

1,139: vacant buildings with violations that must be cleared before reoccupation, from HPD.

455: vacant condos identified by the Right to the City Alliance in 2009.

11,480:

vacant properties identified by Picture the Homeless through dialogue with agencies and other stakeholders!

But there's a lot more information already out there! Many of our FOIL requests have not yet received a response. Some other stores of data could include:

New York State Public Service Commission

Addresses of all residential buildings in the five boroughs of New York City that are currently "off-line," and which have no active power through Consolidated Edison or any other electricity provider certified through the Public Service Committee.

Fire Department

Addresses of all buildings which the Fire Department has determined to be structurally unsound, or to be lacking a roof or stable floors.

Addresses of all buildings for which the Fire Department issued a vacate order that has not been subsequently rescinded.

Addresses of all buildings sealed by the Fire Department for structural instability following a fire or other incident.

Department of Environmental Protection

Addresses of residential buildings within the five boroughs of New York City that do not currently have active water service.

THE NEW YORK OBSERVER
Real Estate

Put Homeless in Vacant Buildings? Not So Fast!

By Matt Chaban

September 30, 2010

What if there were an easy way to figure out all the empty buildings and lots in the city and put them to a better use, like housing the homeless or pushing down the city's exorbitant real estate prices? Advocates, led by **Picture the Homeless**, think there is, in the form of a **census**, which would help identify such properties and figure out what to do with them. The group held a rally yesterday for the census, which is currently under consideration by the City Council.

According to the Gotham Gazette's Wonkster blog, Council Speaker Christine Quinn was none too keen on the plan:

"Collecting that data is enormously expensive," Quinn said, putting the cost at "millions of dollars." In tough fiscal times, she added, "that money may be better spent assisting the homeless."

It's a fair point, but Picture the Homeless argues a census can be achieved for less than \$50,000. The Real Estate Desk wonders if this doesn't have less to do with serving the homeless than serving developers, though. **From WNYC:**

The Rent Stabilization Association, a landlord group, says the Census Bureau already produces a housing and vacancy survey for the city. A spokesman questioned whether a new census is necessary.

Indeed, Manhattan Borough President Scott Stringer (a mayoral hopeful, like Quinn), has been **calling for a similar census** for some years, as he hopes it will put an end to the practice of "warehousing," whereby developers sit on vacant or underused property. The idea is not to build until a greater profit can be made, but it also means there are fewer apartments — not only for the homeless but for all New Yorkers, thus driving up prices for everyone.

The census has support from nearly half the council, but until Quinn is prepared to bring it to the Housing Committee, it is unlikely to get there.



The Rockaways. *Getty Images*

Abogan por viviendas para los desamparados

September 30, 2010

Miembros de la organización para desamparados, Picture the Homeless, se reunieron frente la alcaldía ayer para exigir que el [Concejo Municipal](#) vote sobre legislación que exigiría de la ciudad un conteo anual de los lotes vacíos y propiedades vacantes en los cinco condados, con el fin de proveer más viviendas para personas desamparadas y de bajos recursos.

El proyecto de ley tiene que ser sometido a una audiencia por el comité de viviendas antes de pasar a un voto general. "Cuando decimos que queremos que avance, eso es lo que queremos, que los concejales lo den prioridad", dijo [Tej Nagaraja](#), vocero de la organización.

Un reporte de la organización, que recopiló datos de varias agencias de la ciudad, reveló que la ciudad es propietaria de 1,889 lotes vacíos y que hay otras 1,400 propiedades residenciales sin ocupar. Además, Picture the Homeless creó una página de internet en donde el público puede reportar lotes y propiedades vacías (<http://vacantnyc.crowdmap.com>) en que se han registrado 364 lotes vacíos hasta la fecha.

(ENGLISH TRANSLATION)

Members of the organization for homeless people, Picture the Homeless, gathered in front of City Hall yesterday to demand that the City Council vote on legislation that would demand that the city conduct an annual count of vacant buildings and lots in the five boroughs, with the goal of providing more housing for homeless and low-income people.

The proposed law has to be put to a hearing by the Housing Committee before passing on to a general vote. "When we say that we want this bill to advance, this is what we want—that the Council Members prioritize it," said Tej Nagaraja, spokesperson for the organization.



A report by the organization, that gathered data from various city agencies, revealed that the city owns 1,889 vacant lots—and that there are another 1,400 vacated residential properties. In addition, Picture the Homeless created an internet page in which the public can reporter vacant buildings and lots (<http://vacantnyc.crowdmap.com>) in which 364 vacant properties have already been registered.

CRAIN'S

NEW YORK BUSINESS

Pressure mounts for vacant building census

Despite support from nearly 30 City Council members and others, bill still languishing in committee; group sees poll as means to help find more housing for the homeless.

By Marine Cole

September 29, 2010 1:53 PM

Lobbying for a bill requesting an annual census of vacant buildings and lots across the city is intensifying even as the bill remains in the New York City Council committee where it has languished for more than six months.

A press conference led by Picture the Homeless, which wrote the bill, took place Wednesday morning at City Hall.

"We're out here today to raise awareness about Intro 48, and ask for the City Council to schedule a speedy hearing and floor vote, so that this vital proposal can become law," said a flyer issued by the nonprofit Picture the Homeless.

City Councilwoman Melissa Mark-Viverito proposed Intro 48 in February to have the city conduct an annual census of vacant buildings and vacant lots in the five boroughs. Since then, the bill has sat in the Committee on Housing and Buildings awaiting a hearing date, despite support from nearly 30 City Council members.

Picture the Homeless launched an interactive website this summer to solicit the public to report vacant buildings and lots. The organization argues that the census would help locate unused residential buildings that could be used to provide housing for the homeless and would help bring down the cost of real estate, too.

It also said that while some City Council members may be concerned of the cost of a census, it commissioned two separate costs analyses, both of which came in under \$75,000, according to its website.

Ms. Mark-Viverito wasn't immediately available for comment.

Correction: Councilwoman Melissa Mark-Viverito didn't attend the press conference lobbying for a bill requesting an annual census of vacant buildings and lots. An earlier version of this article, published Sept. 29, 2010, misstated the press conference's attendee list.