

Jackman details plan to reclaim vacant spaces across City

By Megan Neal

Kendall Jackman was born and raised in Bed-Stuy, Brooklyn. She is a member and leader of Picture the Homeless (PTH) and a leader of Organizing for Occupation (O4O). Her work with PTH includes pushing for the passage of Intro 48, a local bill that would empower New York City to conduct an annual count of vacant buildings and lots which PTH believes ought to be converted into housing for those in need. I spoke with Kendall about her work with Intro 48, affordable housing, and her hopes for Bed-Stuy.

You've been a part of O4O since its very beginning. Why did you join O4O and take a leadership role in the movement?

I joined O4O because the end goals of PTH and O4O are the same, while the methods of achieving that goal are slightly different. PTH wants to pass legislation to stop the warehousing of buildings and turn them into affordable housing. O4O has a more direct action way of achieving that goal.

Can you describe your work with Intro 48?

In trying to help get the legislation passed, I have met with city council members and community boards. The community boards helped do the vacant property count that Christine Quinn said would be too expensive. I helped design a report about the vacant property count. I do interviews with students and speak at community organizations about the bill.

What preliminary results have you discovered because of your work with Intro 48?

The basic result of PTH's vacant property count is that we were right. There are more than enough vacant buildings to house the homeless. There is more than enough land so that parks can be built, community gardens can be built—whatever the community wants.

There are three community boards that we know for sure in the Bronx, Manhattan, and my favorite borough, Brooklyn. In each board there are 10 to 15 times more vacant apartments than there are shelter units. There is no need to have shelter units when you have 10 to 15 times more vacant apartments and you could be housing people in those apartments.

How do you hope that Intro 48 will change New York City? And the individuals that read the report?

The first thing we want is a change to the City Charter to include a vacant property count. This would be done annually by the City government. Right now, every agency keeps information about vacant property differently and most agencies will tell you they don't have the information.

Secondly, from the information we are gathering from the vacant property counts, we will know who has been warehousing property for the longest. There are laws on the books that would require property owners to do something else with warehoused property besides giving it to people who will build a sports stadium on it, like the Atlantic Yards project.

We will know who owns the property, and the City will take it from them. Once property is taken back, it would be turned into affordable housing for people in the City.

Finally, we have been working with professors to examine community land trust and mutual land trust models similar to Cooper Square. We are trying to figure out what models would work best with New York City. The bottom line is we are trying to reclaim housing and we can't afford Mayor Bloomberg's idea of affordable housing. Land trusts look like a good option because you could guarantee that housing remain affordable for 99 years. You would have an affordable apartment that you know you could be in forever. I like this because the models we're looking at include single family homes and brownstones, and these models include those kinds of homes.

I am a native New Yorker. The neighborhood that I grew up in, Bed-Stuy, looks like a wasteland now. You used to know your next door neighbors and there was such a sense of community, but we don't have that anymore. Now we have more vacant apartments than shelter units. I just want New York back the way it was. I want it the way it was when I was a kid growing up. I want my city back.

Join the O4O Construction Team!

Lumber, tools, supplies, donations, and workers
(skilled and/or energetic) needed!

Contact: construction@o4onyc.org