

# Making Room: New Models for Housing

An Exhibit at the Museum of the City of New York

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The micro-unit apartment building at 335 East 27th Street in Manhattan will feature a light brick façade with a series of setbacks and cantilevers.



My Micro NY will be the first multi-family building in Manhattan to use modular construction, piecing together modules prefabricated by Capsys at the Brooklyn Navy Yard.

**W**hat are we going to do with the one million new residents coming into New York City over the next two decades, more than half of whom will likely be single, when we don't have enough studios and one-bedrooms to house the disproportionately single population we've got already?

The prevailing solution today is to cram them into the existing housing stock, several to a unit. But what kind of way is that to live? Besides, it's illegal in some cases. There's a limit to how many unrelated people can occupy one apartment, regardless of its size. Three, the law says. And current New York City zoning forbids developers to build apartments under 400 square feet in new construction.

Mayor Bloomberg, famous for micro-managing lifestyle in New York to improve it, announced his solution to the problem last July: the micro-apartment. Together with HPD, the mayor launched "adAPT NYC," a pilot program based on a long-term project by the Citizens Housing & Planning Council (CHPC) of New York to develop a new model for residential construction in New York City.

The program asked developers to submit RFPs to design, build and operate a micro-unit apartment building on city-owned land in Kips Bay. Apartments in the complex would be just 275 to 300 square feet, yet livable enough — commodious even — to justify downsizing the zoning regs citywide and coax developers to add big numbers of small apartments to their new projects.

The winning and runner-up apartment designs are on display at an exhibit entitled "Making Room" at the Museum of the City of New York running through September 2013. In addition to the prize-winning designs, the exhibit, co-produced by CHPC, features a full-sized furnished 325-square-foot micro-studio apartment and models and drawings of housing designs commissioned in 2011 by CHPC in partnership with the Architectural League of New York and examples of small dwellings in the U.S. and around the world.

## Let's Get Small

Mayor Bloomberg's push for smaller apartment layouts and the museum exhibit were inspired by a five-year study conducted by CHPC on how to

reconfigure housing in New York City to catch up with changing demographics.

"Thirty-three percent of New York City's housing units are occupied by single people living alone," wrote CHPC's Jerilyn Perine and Sarah Watson. "And a third of single persons living alone actually under-occupy housing, by living in a two bedroom apartment or larger. While some portion of these households are not revealing lodgers or boarders to survey takers, many others are truly under-occupying their units by choice or because more suitable housing is unavailable to them. More than half of these reported single person households benefit from some form of rent regulation."

The data suggests an opportunity for developers, if only the city would allow them to build smaller units. Scaled-down, affordable apartments in amenity-rich buildings convenient to transportation, if designed well, could tempt singles to give up their oversized rent-stabilized apartments. And they enable builders to put significantly greater numbers of housing units in dense areas of the city to accommodate the increasing number of single people just entering the housing market.



## LaunchPad

The centerpiece of the exhibit is LaunchPad, a full-scale 325-square-foot “micro-unit” studio designed with multi-functional systems created by Clei, an Italian furnishings company, Recourse Furniture, architect Pierluigi Colombo and Amie Gross Architects. Almost every piece of furniture opens, slides, unfolds or transforms in some way to serve multiple functions for different times of day: a couch becomes a bed, the flat-screen TV slides away to reveal a glass bar, and a hidden desk folds down from a wall.



*LaunchPad, a full-scale 325-square-foot “micro-unit” studio installed at the Museum of the City of New York. The Making Room exhibit runs through September 2013*

“We now call on industry leaders and policy experts to develop an agenda for changing the housing regulatory framework in New York by working closely with the City officials responsible for their oversight and enforcement,” wrote Perine and Watson.

“We have before us an opportunity to establish housing standards and designs that give people a wide choice to live in safe and decent housing, to live alone or with people of their choosing, and the choice to live in housing that adapts to

their needs, rather than having to adapt their lives to the housing that they can find. We should not squander it.”

## My Micro NY

The winner of the adAPT NYC Competition is a project entitled “My Micro NY,” submitted by a development team composed of Monadnock Development LLC, Actors Fund Housing Development Corporation and nArchitects, which designed the project. “My Micro NY” will be featured

at the Making Room exhibit at the Museum of the City of New York along with some of the 33 other submissions to the competition.

Construction on the city-owned site at 335 East 27th Street in Kips Bay will begin at the end of 2014. The 10-story building will house 55 new micro-units designed to optimize space and maximize the sense of openness, plus amenities including an attic garden, fitness facility, and ground-floor café and performance space. ○



*The micro-apartments are designed to optimize space and maximize the sense of openness.*