

# DAILY NEWS

NEW YORK'S HOMETOWN NEWSPAPER

## How to make it Old York City

**A**uthor Susan Jacoby wrote in her book on aging, "Never Say Die," that "anyone lucky enough to be a New Yorker is already a resident of an assisted living community."

There's some truth to that: The city has elevator buildings, easy and affordable delivery of many goods and services, top-notch public transportation, local shops and stores and artistic and cultural opportunities a short bus or taxi ride away. All of these features make life for those aging in the city more livable.

But the city's elderly also face many obstacles. For them, it is still a tale of two cities. And several issues need to be addressed before New York can claim to be the nation's biggest and best Naturally Occurring Retirement Community — or, to put it another way, New Norc, New Norc.

For the past year, leaders from churches and synagogues affiliated with Metro Industrial Areas Foundation organizations have identified a wide range of immediate threats to the quality of life of aging New Yorkers.

They have inspected hundreds of intersections to identify locations that pose a hazard to those with limited mobility.

They have visited hundreds of stores in shopping strips and retail areas to determine which provided seating and bath-

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BY RABBI ROBERT LEVINE  
and NORMAN FAIRWEATHER

room facilities, as well as which would offer discounts to shoppers who are elderly.

They have reviewed Social Security administration facilities, particularly in Queens and Brooklyn, and worked with leaders to improve the conditions in those important locations.

They have stood at bus stops with stopwatches to monitor the frequency and timeliness of bus service — and have reported a worrisome decline in service from the highly valued MTA transportation alternative known as Access-A-Ride.

And they have met with and interviewed more than 4,000 seniors in the process to get their views of all of the issues — local and larger — that make their lives more difficult than they need to be.

The encouraging news is that many local concerns can be addressed without major injections of new resources. And the city's Department for the Aging, led by the capable and savvy Lilliam Barrios-Paoli, is a good and consistent advocate for the needs of seniors.

The more sobering news is that there remain challenges that require more focused leadership, additional revenues or both.

The first of these issues is housing — one of the two major cost pressures on aging New Yorkers. As many as 30,000 units of New York City Housing Authority developments are occupied by seniors who once headed large families, but who are now living alone or with one other family member. They struggle to maintain large apartments while younger families languish in shelters or substandard rental housing, waiting for years to be offered a NYCHA unit.

The challenge is to build a new generation of affordable senior housing on NYCHA property so that elderly tenants can move into a unit in their community, while a larger family can claim the larger unit.

NYCHA has begun to build a few of these senior developments, but at a snail's pace. This effort must accelerate.

For elderly who are middle income and also burdened with apartments that are too large and hard to manage, the city should consider tailoring zoning standards to encourage developers to build structures that are both suitable and affordable for seniors by awarding density bonuses, as they have for artist housing.

The second major issue is health care — both its affordability and the availability of qualified home health aides who are paid a living wage for their critical work. The Visiting Nurse Service of New York and other agencies provide cutting-edge service, but could do far more with additional resources and support.

We believe that New York — a place in which, thanks in part to Mayor Bloomberg's efforts, people are thankfully living longer, healthier lives — can build on its unique qualities to become the nation's premier urban setting for those who are aging.

Bloomberg has shown an admirable focus on ensuring our schools serve our young people. In his last years in office, in addition to his other important priorities, the mayor can lead on the other end of the age scale — making the city better for its oldest residents as well.

That's a legacy that would benefit New Yorkers for generations to come.

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**In some basic ways,  
N.Y.C. still fails  
to meet the needs  
of elderly residents**