

Memorandum

To: Interested Parties

From: Ron Shiffman

Date: July 21, 2026

Re: Estimated Housing Need by Income in New York City

New York City's housing challenge is fundamentally an affordability crisis rather than simply a shortage of units. Available housing and census data indicate that the overwhelming share of unmet need is concentrated among households earning below 80% of Area Median Income (AMI), particularly those below 50% AMI. The estimates below are planning-level estimates that combine unmet demand with the need to preserve and replace affordable housing.

Income Category	Estimated Housing Need	Priority
0–30% AMI	400,000–500,000 units	Highest
31–50% AMI	125,000–175,000 units	Very High
51–80% AMI	75,000–125,000 units	High
81–120% AMI	40,000–75,000 units	Moderate
121–165% AMI	20,000–40,000 units	Limited
>165% AMI	Little or no subsidized need	Market

Key Findings

These estimates imply a total affordability gap of roughly 700,000 to 900,000 households. Approximately 80–85% of the need is concentrated below 80% AMI, demonstrating that New York City's housing problem is primarily one of affordability.

Policy Implications

Public resources should prioritize preservation of NYCHA, Mitchell-Lama developments, rent-stabilized housing, and naturally affordable housing while expanding permanently affordable social housing. A planning framework would allocate approximately 60% of new public housing resources to households below 30% AMI, 20% to households between 31% and 50% AMI, 15% to households between 51% and 80% AMI, and no more than 5% above 80% AMI except where mixed-income projects are needed. The central policy question should be: 'Who are we building for?'