



Bronx Commons may lose its affordable housing for senior musicians

The affordable housing project could be in violation of the Fair Housing Act, city says

BY [RACHEL SUGAR](#) MAR 20, 2017, 11:15AM EDT



Courtesy of Danois Architects and WXY

Bronx Commons, the highly anticipated [all-affordable housing development in Melrose](#), is angling to be more than a residential project: it's also the future home of the Bronx Music Hall, a 300-seat music and arts-focused venue. But while the music hall is designed to honor the “deeply rooted history of cutting edge Bronx music,” the those aging Bronx musicians could be out of luck.

Back when the project broke ground in January, Nancy Biberman, who runs the [Women's Housing and Economic Development Corp. \(WHEDco.\)](#)—which is developing the project with BFC Partners—had hoped to earmark 15 percent of the building's 305 units for older musicians, [the New York Times reports](#). The plan was to

“involve them in the activities of the Bronx Music Hall ... giving them a chance to continue making and teaching new music to a new generation.”

The idea was for those units to be a kind of life raft for the the sidemen who used to play the many venues that lined the streets of the South Bronx. Now, those venues are long gone, the borough is changing, and those long-time musicians are left in “a precarious situation.” As the *Times* points out, “even well-known artists can find themselves scrambling for affordable housing when poor health prevents them from performing.”

“There is no affordable housing for aging musicians,” Biberman told the *Times*. “There is senior housing, but that’s depressing, honestly. The elder artists I met did not want to be living in a building with people who are just old. They wanted to be who they were—musicians—and not isolated in an old-age home.” Thus, the 45 or so earmarked units.

But while she’d assumed the proposal would be approved by the city — especially since Mayor de Blasio has already set a goal of 1,500 units of affordable housing for artists throughout the city, like PS109, a live-work space in East Harlem—Biberman was told that a “set-aside might violate fair housing laws that prohibit preferences based on age or race,” and that the Bronx Commons plan was “different from housing for live-work spaces for artists.”

A spokesperson for the city’s Department of Housing Preservation and Development told the *Times* that while the aging musician housing at Bronx Commons was a no-go, “there would be many opportunities for this population in future developments.” Until then, the musicians can apply for affordable housing lotteries.

Biberman is not convinced. “I have not heard any good reason,” she told the paper. “They just said I can’t do it. I figured we’ll just get this project in the ground and fight this battle another day.”

FULL LINK: <http://ny.curbed.com/2017/3/20/14980816/bronx-commons-affordable-housing-melrose-seniors>