

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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BRONX VACANT PROPERTIES COUNT

Picture the Homeless and Hunter College launch unprecedented survey that will reveal the extent of vacant property in NYC

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Fordham, Bronx.—In a borough that was notorious worldwide for vacant buildings, Picture the Homeless (PTH) and Hunter College’s Center for Community Planning and Development (HCCCPD) have announced the first-ever count of vacant buildings and lots throughout the five boroughs. The survey, to be launched in June 2011, is the first of its kind and is unprecedented in scope. At 11:00am in front of a vacant building and lot at 2247 Walton Avenue that symbolize the many found in the Bronx, Picture the Homeless members and the Bronx community speak out about the importance of a vacant property count.

Picture the Homeless member Alease Lowe states, “My family moved to the Bronx when I was eight. I became homeless at the age of 21. At that time I didn’t know of any organization that could help a person in my situation. I was placed in a shelter in Staten Island which, as you can imagine, was a hassle. With all of the vacant buildings found in the Bronx, I could have had an actual place to live. There should be no reason why there are so many homeless people in New York City when there are so many homes without people!”

Councilwoman Helen D. Foster whose district has one of the highest rates of vacancy in the Bronx states, “I commend Picture The Homeless for your leadership in the project of locating all of the vacant buildings and lots in the City and making the City accountable to turn them into permanent, affordable housing for low and moderate income tenants as an alternative to warehousing people in shelters.”

Letitia Ledan states, “I have been a resident of the Bronx for ten years. The Vacant Property Count in our Borough will be an important step in creating housing for all homeless New Yorkers. I have been a Picture the Homeless member for 4years and along with this action we will continue to fight for the rights of homeless people and the availability of proper affordable housing.”

“In the wake of the Great Recession, New York City has been forced to cope with huge increases in the homeless population while the system has struggled to keep up, all while thousands of vacant buildings go unused each night across the City,” said Council Member Annabel Palma, Chair of the Council’s Committee on General Welfare. “These vacant buildings offer the perfect opportunity for the City to increase its stock of affordable housing while appropriately addressing the issue of homelessness. Instead of talking about the costs of a vacant lot survey, we should be talking about the benefits that this survey would bring, not only helping to rehabilitate neighborhoods that have been devastated by the bad economy, but also offering a real opportunity to get families out of the shelter and into affordable and permanent housing.

Bronx resident and Picture the Homeless member Darlene Bryant states, “I lost my home in 2010 due to a corrupt super that used certain city legislation to force me out. As a homeless woman, this count means a lot to me and those have been through homelessness. Counting all of these vacant buildings will lead to possible renovations of the empty buildings we pass everyday in our neighborhoods.”

“I congratulate Picture the Homeless on the start of their important survey. I hope that the data they find will help both the Bronx and the City as a whole to take better advantage of our available housing resources,” said Bronx Borough President Ruben Diaz Jr.

The survey is the latest development in Picture the Homeless’s multi-year campaign to document the extent of vacant property in NYC. PTH argues that vacancy inflates the cost of housing in the city and is a root cause of homelessness. Preliminary findings, available on Vacant NYC (www.vacantnyc.crowdmap.com), maps over 11,000 vacant buildings and lots, city wide: most of which were provided by city agency data.

For interviews with PTH members and Hunter College faculty, call Adrian Paling or Kendall Jackman at 646-314-6423. In addition, PTH will be tweeting updates from the press conference. Follow <http://twitter.com/pthny> and hashtag #NYCvacancysurvey