



Gubernatorial forum in Union County on affordable housing

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(Photo: -Courtesy of Build a Thriving New Jersey)

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Members of Union County's faith-based community and community development groups hosted a forum on Tuesday for elected officials and future leaders. "The Union County Candidates and Community Leader's Forum to Build a Thriving New Jersey" provided local residents the opportunity to hear from candidates running for governor and other offices about their plans to make New Jersey a more affordable place to live.

"Our elected officials and leaders are responsible for building a better N.J.," said Staci Berger, president and chief executive officer of the Housing and Community Development Network of New Jersey, said in a news release. "Our leaders need to address our housing crisis, including the foreclosure crisis and the high cost of renting an apartment. To that end, we are asking all of them to endorse our platform to 'Build a Thriving N.J.'"

Participating in the forum were New Jersey Democratic gubernatorial candidates state Sen. Raymond Lesniak, representing District 20, Assemblyman John Wisniewski, from District 19, and Green Party gubernatorial candidate Seth Kaper-Dale.

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Assemblywoman Annette Quijano was there representing Democratic gubernatorial candidate Ambassador Phil Murphy and Senate Democratic candidate Joseph Cryan, the Union County sheriff.

All candidates for governor were invited to attend or send a representative. Kaper-Dale, Lesniak, and Wisniewski each endorsed the Build a Thriving N.J. platform during the event. Also, announcing his endorsement but unable to participate in Tuesday's event was Assembly Housing and Community Development Committee Chair Jerry Green District 22.

Build a Thriving New Jersey calls on the next leaders of the state to invest \$600 million annually into homes residents can afford. The Housing and Community Development Network launched the Build a Thriving N.J. campaign to boost the state's economy through a plan that creates affordable home opportunities and jobs for state residents.

The state previously invested in 10 community development programs but over the last decade cut much of the funding which has been diverted or abandoned, according to the group's news release. Several of the programs housing advocates say will help Build a Thriving N.J. include supporting the Affordable Housing Trust Fund, the State Rental Assistance Program, the Neighborhood Revitalization Tax Credit Program, Lead Poisoning Prevention and Weatherization and Homeless Service Programs.

"We appeal to all lawmakers and community planners to create neighborhoods and housing plans that are inclusive of all socioeconomic groups," said Geleen Donovan, executive director of Family Promise Union County. "This presents a vital plan that includes essential housing-related funds that were diverted to other state budget categories in the past."

The forum was conducted at the Holy Cross Lutheran Church in Springfield and sponsored by Community Access Unlimited, Elizabeth Coalition to House the Homeless, Family Promise Union County, Gateway Family YMCA, HomeFirst, Housing & Community Development Network of NJ, Iris House, Monarch Housing Associates, and the Union County Interfaith Coordinating Council.

"This event provided an excellent opportunity for Union County residents to make the case that a state investment is needed to ensure that all N.J. residents can afford a place to call home," said Richard Brown, chief executive officer of Monarch Housing Associates. "The Union County Interfaith Coordinating Council continues to help us build momentum for the 'Build a Thriving New Jersey' effort after a successful event in March and Homeless Sabbath in December. Because funding is critical at both the state and federal levels, Monarch Housing advocates and their partners will be in Washington, D.C. in July for a congressional reception to fight the cuts."

To learn more about Build a Thriving New Jersey visit www.hcdnnj.org/buildathrivingnj.



