

## Senior Vacant Unit Initiative

**Issue Area:** Housing

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### **Summary:**



The Senior Vacant Unit Initiative is a program started in Boston to help expand the affordable housing stock in the region. It allows for older adults, who own multi-family homes, to rehabilitate and rent out their vacant units. The program helps older adults get needed extra income and helps reduce the region's vacancy rate. The program was created by Mayor Menino and is in collaboration with a variety of other organizations, foundations, and corporations.

Mayor Menino started the program in 2001 and declared "The Senior Vacant Unit Program allows us to reach out to our low-income seniors who own multi-family homes and help them repair any units that are sitting vacant." Boston has had a growth of low-income older adults who live in multi-family homes. Many of them have vacant units that the homeowner is unable to rent because they don't have adequate funds and usually do not qualify for conventional financing options. The funding to repair vacant units does not come from the city of Boston alone. The program draws on funding from other programs in Boston under the Department of Neighborhood Development such as its Senior Home Repair Program. Other organizations such as the Nuestra Comunidad Development Corporation, the Neighborhood of Affordable Housing, and the Boston Federal Savings Bank as well as the Dedham Institution have all given financial support to fund the rehabilitations. One of the earlier rehabilitated homes was owned by Bertram Alleyne who said the program, "takes you out of what I call economic slavery." Other housing rehabilitations have cost a total of two hundred and thirty thousand dollars.

To qualify for the program an applicant must be at least sixty-two years old and have an income that does not exceed



*Senior Vacant Unit recipient,  
Bertram Alleyne*

eighty percent of HUD's median family income. He/she must also be an owner of a two to four-family dwelling in the city and have at least one vacant unit. Finally the applicant must commit that the rent price is kept at affordable prices over the next 10 years. The program has been successful thus far in assisting fourteen homeowners and renovating over 25 units that have been initiated into the housing market.

**Related Resources:**

“Mayor Menino Announces Funding Initiative For Senior Homeowner Program.” City of Boston. October 16, 2001. <<http://www.cityofboston.gov/news/pr.asp?ID=1018>>.

“Initiative Turns Seniors into Landlords.” The Christian Science Monitor. May 17, 2004. <<http://www.csmonitor.com/2004/0517/p15s01-lihc.html>>.

“Community Revitalization: 2002—2003 Grants. Nuestra Comunidad Development Corporation.” SURDNA Foundation. <<http://www.surdna.org/grants/community.html>>.