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Cuomo official on de Blasio's 'laudable' housing plans

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A top housing official from Gov. Andrew Cuomo's administration praised Mayor Bill de Blasio's housing plans during a speech Monday night — a rare show of public accord between the dueling administrations.

James Rubin, commissioner of New York State Homes and Community Renewal, called de Blasio's goal of creating more low-income housing through rezoning land "laudable one way or another" during a nine-minute keynote speech at the New York City Housing Partnership.

Rubin opened his remarks at the Refinery Rooftop in Midtown Manhattan by joking that he intended to "make exactly zero news."

He offered a fairly positive critique of the mayor's plans, which involve using city-permitted land rezonings to require developers to build more apartments that would be available to low- and moderate-income residents.

"I was reminded of how complicated this business is today when I was visiting with a state senator in his office uptown, and he was talking about the rezoning efforts that are going on which I think most of us would agree are laudable one way or another — the mayor's rezoning efforts," Rubin said.

He said he "totally agree(s) with the goal" of increasing the housing stock but warned "there's only a finite amount of developable land and every action has another reaction, so it's an extraordinarily complicated field."

"It's not as simple as just saying, 'okay, well we're going to develop mixed income here'" and ensure those who are priced out can still have homes elsewhere in the city because "the over here doesn't really exist in New York City except way, way far away," Rubin said.

De Blasio plans to build apartments, through policies and city subsidies, that would be rented to a mix of income levels, and has tried to allay growing fears throughout low-income neighborhoods about gentrification.

"Fortunately we have a mayor and a governor who agree that affordable housing does far more than provide shelter. It creates and anchors communities, which is essential to a strong and just society. Unfortunately we have a congress that cuts HUD (the federal Housing and Urban Development department) budgets at every opportunity," Rubin said.

De Blasio worked for Cuomo when the current governor served as HUD secretary under Bill Clinton.

Among those in attendance Monday night were Gary Rodney, president of New York City Housing Development Corporation, and several officials from the Department of Housing and Preservation Development.

Rubin also said the Cuomo administration will launch a series of conferences throughout the state, beginning in Utica and eventually in New York City, to discuss affordable housing with nonprofits and religious institutions.