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**Gale A. Brewer, Borough President**

## **Gale A. Brewer, Manhattan Borough President Testimony to the NYC Housing Authority On the Draft PHA Agency Plan for Fiscal Year 2017 August 3, 2016**

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My name is Gale A. Brewer and I am the Manhattan Borough President. I represent Manhattan's 98 NYCHA developments totaling 53,105 units of public housing. Thank you to Chair Shola Olatoye and members of the NYCHA Board for the opportunity to testify today.

A year ago, I testified before the Board on the then-brand-new NextGeneration NYCHA Plan, expressing concerns for some initiatives and cautious optimism for others. Like any comprehensive multiyear strategic plan, the true test of success will lie in whether implementing NextGen's four principal goals and 15 targeted strategies will result in a more fiscally sound and efficient NYCHA and improved quality of life for residents.

I commend NYCHA for the over 30 NextGeneration NYCHA accomplishments achieved in the past year as outlined in the FY17 Draft PHA Agency Plan. Each accomplishment, from rolling out the MyNYCHA app so residents can use modern technology to manage their repair requests to installing CCTV and lighting to improve safety at MAP (Mayor's Action Plan for Neighborhood Safety) developments, was the result of countless hours of work by NYCHA's dedicated staff. I believe it is important to acknowledge the massive task that it is to run and improve NYCHA on a day-to-day level. Thank you to Chair Shola Olatoye and to staff at NYCHA for your work in operating the equivalent of a 400,000-person city.

That said, I have signed on to the Alliance to Preserve Public Housing's comments to address major issues to NYCHA's FY17 Draft PHA Agency Plan. I urge the Chair and Board members to consider the Alliance's recommendations. Additionally, I would like to speak on several initiatives mentioned in the draft plan.

### **NextGeneration Neighborhoods – Holmes Towers**

Last fall, NYCHA selected Holmes Towers in Manhattan's Upper East Side and Wyckoff Gardens in Brooklyn as sites for the first phase of NextGeneration Neighborhoods. New residential units constructed at both locations will be a 50-50 split of market-rate and affordable housing. I have repeatedly voiced concerns regarding the mixed-income model and have called for 100% affordable housing, so it is disappointing that NYCHA is moving forward with this plan for an expected 175 to 200 market units to be constructed on public housing land. In light of this, I urge NYCHA and members of the Holmes Towers Stakeholder Committee to ensure that revenues generated from the new construction are prioritized for meeting the capital repair needs of the existing buildings located at the infill sites.

NYCHA has demonstrated its commitment to resident engagement by holding visioning meetings with Holmes residents throughout the past year. NYCHA also established the Holmes

Stakeholder Committee comprised of tenants, community-based organizations, Community Board 8 members, and elected officials. Unlike the process at Wyckoff Gardens, which under the requirements of a community plan will have to go through ULURP, the Holmes' Stakeholder Committee serves as the sole mechanism for residents and the larger community to engage with NYCHA and the developer. Since the committee will be engaged to discuss a variety of topics, some of which will require specialized technical or professional knowledge, I call for a flexible membership for the committee so that knowledgeable residents and stakeholders may be added to contribute their expertise to the process.

I am heartened by NYCHA's efforts to engage residents, but issues of transparency still remain. According to Holmes Towers residents who attended the visioning meetings, three sites—A, B, and C—were proposed for infill development. No one voted for Site B, yet it became the location identified for development in the RFP. How was this decision made, and why ask residents to vote when their preference did not seem to have an impact? If NextGeneration Neighborhoods at Holmes is to be a process that is truly led by stakeholder engagement, then NYCHA needs to solicit *and* consider community input. This is important especially with important decisions on the horizon including identifying Holmes' current \$33 million capital needs and how will capital projects be prioritized as funds generated from NextGeneration Neighborhoods become available for making repairs.

Stakeholder engagement is also important for broader neighborhood planning. The Holmes infill is expected to add approximately 300 new residential units to the site's existing 537 apartments, an increase of roughly 55%. How will this impact the neighborhood as a whole? What new strains will increased population place on the area's infrastructure, local businesses, park space, schools, etc.?

Moving forward, I hope to see more meaningful engagement and urge NYCHA to follow through on your dedication to community principles throughout the process.

### **Employment Opportunities Under REES**

Residents can get trained and connected to jobs through the Resident Economic Empowerment & Sustainability (REES) program. According to the FY17 Draft PHA Agency Plan, REES has placed 1,398 people in jobs facilitated through Section 3 mandates and through Jobs Plus sites.<sup>1</sup> Though not directly comparable to FY16 numbers because the reporting periods are of different lengths, FY 17 placements within approximately six-months are on track to match FY16's total placements within nine-months.<sup>2</sup>

Yet NYCHA needs to do more than attain previous levels. Over the next several years, I would like to see increases in completion of REES trainings and job placements as we anticipate new employment opportunities under NextGeneration Neighborhoods. Since not all projects will trigger the Section 3 mandate, efforts must be made to train and place residents in *all* NextGeneration Neighborhoods jobs. NYCHA should track the number of residents who are hired for construction and post-construction jobs specifically as a result of infill developments and make the data available in future annual plans.

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<sup>1</sup> FY17 Annual Plan pp. 81-82, placements made between September 2015 and February to April 2016, depending on job placement program.

<sup>2</sup> In NYCHA's FY16's Final Annual Plan, a total of 1,995 jobs placement were reported over a nine-month period.

## **Rental Assistance Demonstration/Permanent Affordability Commitment Together**

NYCHA has proposed to convert 5,100 units of public housing into Section 8 housing during the first wave of HUD's Rental Assistance Demonstration (RAD) program, also called Permanent Affordability Commitment Together (PACT) for NYCHA's RAD conversions. Of those, 373 units are in Manhattan. From the perspective of alleviating NYCHA's \$17 billion of unmet capital needs, the RAD program is promising. NYCHA's RAD partners will leverage funds through HUD's HAP contract to generate much needed capital repair funds. Under HUD's requirement of automatic renewal of the HAP contract, long-term affordability is guaranteed and residents will continue to pay 30% of their income towards rent.

In order to successfully implement the RAD program, NYCHA must be transparent throughout the process from start to finish, keeping those who will be affected informed. I thank NYCHA for remaining with HUD guidelines to define a RAD conversion as a "significant amendment."<sup>3</sup> This, along with guidelines from HUD Notice PIH 2012-32 Section 1.8 on resident notification, will pave the way for open communication and transparency.

Effective communication, however, is not yet consistent across all developments identified in the first cohort of RAD conversion. After discussing RAD/PACT with Ann Morris, president of Manhattanville Houses, I was left quite concerned with the lack of communication from NYCHA. Ms. Morris informed my staff that residents of the 97 units in Manhattanville Houses were not notified that their buildings, Rehab 2 and Rehab 3, were placed on the list for RAD conversion.

My office also spoke with Ms. Cynthia Tibbs of the WSUR Brownstones who expressed similar concerns. She only recently learned that her building was targeted for RAD. While NYCHA held six meetings in June on RAD, residents received no notice of the first five meetings. NYCHA informed residents of the sixth meeting via robocalls, but not everybody received the message. In fact, it was through notification from my office that residents found out about the final meeting. Yet most people were not able to attend—the meeting was held on a Tuesday at 10 am, an inconvenient time for many residents due to their work schedules.

I understand that notifying over 5,000 households of RAD/PACT is a huge undertaking and that NYCHA has tried to engage with residents through information meetings, door-to-door surveys, mass mailing, and robocalls. As RAD/PACT outreach continues, NYCHA must truly engage residents and their many questions regarding upcoming changes. At the least, door-to-door surveys should not happen on Father's Day, and information should be consistent—residents were first informed that relocation will not be necessary but were later told in a meeting that they might be relocated. While I know that logistics continue to be worked out, conflicting details cause confusion and result in the spread of inaccurate information.

I remain hopeful that RAD will bring in capital repair funds without diminishing resident participation during and after conversion into Project Based Section 8. The RAD Roundtable, led by Community Service Society of New York and Enterprise Community Partners, Inc. in

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<sup>3</sup> Attachment 1B: Residents Provisions in Conversions of Assistance from Public Housing to PBRA and PBV, p. 7 of "NYCHA Rental Assistance Demonstration Principles," June 2016.

partnership with NYCHA and residents in RAD buildings, has demonstrated active stakeholder engagement and I urge NYCHA to continue convening Roundtable meetings.

Finally, NYCHA should establish a resident leaders body similar to the current Citywide Council of Presidents (CCOP) for all RAD/PACT developments. Many of the buildings slated for RAD conversions have an active Resident Association with strong leadership that engages regularly with NYCHA through CCOP. While post-RAD conversion developments will have “Resident Organizations” (RO), there is no larger body like CCOP to connect residents among RAD buildings. A CCOP for ROs will allow resident leaders to discuss shared issues, collaborate on solutions, and collectively engage with NYCHA and their new management companies in the spirit of resident leadership that currently defines NYCHA tenants.

## **Sustainability**

I commend NYCHA for taking an integrated approach to planning for long-term sustainability for all NYCHA developments. In April of this year, I met with NYCHA’s VP of Energy and Sustainability Bomee Jung, who provided my office with an overview of the five goals and 17 strategies to achieve a more environmentally sustainable NYCHA. I am excited about large-scale projects such as installing 2.5 million ft<sup>2</sup> of solar panels and aligning major rehabs and new constructions with Enterprise Green Communities Criteria.

At the same time, it is on-the-ground efforts that impact the perception of a cleaner and healthier NYCHA. One of the most visible sustainability strategies is the installation of recycling bins. For every three high-rise buildings, one set of green and blue bins are placed near the midpoint of the buildings. While I believe indoor recycling will result in higher participation, I understand that using a central location is meant to encourage more recycling while NYCHA focuses on education and behavioral change.

Unfortunately, residents are telling my office that recycling is not working. President Gregory Floyd of Teamsters Local 237, the union for NYCHA workers, informed me of the following: “Teamsters Local 237 continues to support efforts to help ensure a healthier and safer environment at NYCHA developments. NYCHA’s recycling program however, is not producing the desired results. Our members report that residents are not recycling. Conditions are contaminated and not improved.”

Residents of Grant Houses, pioneers in introducing recycling into public housing long before NYCHA’s recycling initiative, have noticed that, without the door-to-door peer education that Ms. Sarah Martin and other resident leaders utilized to teach residents about recycling, the bins are not used properly. Similarly, Ms. Ethel Velez of Johnson Houses is asking NYCHA for a door-knocking recycling education campaign because having meetings that no one attends is not enough.

As Chair Olatoye and NYCHA staff all know, I and my staff attend every Manhattan development’s Family Day each summer. This year, my staff were asked to observe whether, at any of the Family Days, special efforts were made to collect recyclables for the bins. Sadly, recycling was not presented as an alternative for participants to dispose of their plastic, metal, or glass. Family Days are an ideal setting for recycling outreach: use of clear garbage bags to collect bottles, plastic cups, plastic utensils, and other recyclables that, due to volume, will not fit

into the bins; inform resident leaders that formerly disposable plasticware is recyclable—many people still do not realize New York City’s recycling rules have changed; coordinate with the Department of Sanitation—perhaps for one day a year at each Family Day, so that food waste can be separated for composting. Each of these steps could improve year round participation.

## **Summary**

In summary, I urge NYCHA leadership to consider the following:

- NextGeneration Neighborhoods at Holmes Towers
  - Ensure that funds generated from the project are prioritized for meeting existing Holmes Towers’ capital needs.
  - Maintain a flexible membership of the Holmes Stakeholder Committee so that knowledgeable residents and stakeholders may be added to contribute their expertise to the process.
- REES and Job Placements
  - Track the number of residents who are hired for construction and post-construction jobs specifically as a result of infill developments and make the data available in future annual plans.
- RAD/PACT
  - Engage residents and their many questions regarding upcoming changes.
  - Continue to convene RAD Roundtable meetings.
  - Establish a resident leaders’ body similar to the current Citywide Council of Presidents (CCOP) for all RAD/PACT developments.
- Sustainability
  - Increase participation in recycling through initiatives such as a door-knocking campaign.
  - Use Family Days to demonstrate recycling practices.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I look forward to continue working with NYCHA and its residents on these important issues.