

Russell Squire
Chair

Will Brightbill
District Manager



505 Park Avenue, Suite 620
New York, N.Y. 10022-1106
(212) 758-4340
(212) 758-4616 (Fax)
www.cb8m.com – Website
info@cb8m.com – E-Mail

**The City of New York
Community Board 8 Manhattan
Social Justice Committee
Monday, October 25, 2021 – 6:30PM
*This meeting was conducted via Zoom***

Please note: The resolutions contained in the committee minutes are recommendations submitted by the committee chair to the Community Board. At the monthly full board meeting, the resolutions are discussed and voted upon by all members of Community Board 8 Manhattan.

MINUTES

CB8 Members Present: Lori Bores, Loraine Brown, Sarah Chu, Saundrea I. Coleman, Valerie Mason, Wendy Machaver*, Gregory Morris, Russell Squire, Rami Sigal

*Public Member

1. A brief overview of NYCHA (New York City Housing Authority)

- NYCHA was formed in 1930s and remains the only truly affordable housing in NYC
- There has been a serious disinvestment over the years and repairs are desperately needed to the infrastructure and to bring buildings up to habitable conditions.
- NYCHA is currently under a federal monitorship.

2. Presentation by: Thoracic Surgeon Dr. Raja M. Flores

- Background:
 - Professor and Chair of Thoracic Surgery, at Mt. Sinai and Community Board 11 member. Raised by a single mother and lived in NYCHA.
 - Advocating for change in housing issues after seeing so many patients harmed by public housing.
- Government's Role in Medicine
 - Federal government spent \$150 billion on cancer drugs just last year and 74% of that money was spent on drugs that did not extend life. However, effective screening is more effective than treatment and when you find something small and early, the cure rate is 80%. We have a cure for lung cancer called surgery, but you have to find it early. In contrast, \$250 million was spent on screening and the difference is that Pharmaceuticals are a huge industry and drug treatment is more profitable than prevention. Prevention is not profitable, but it saves more lives.
 - Prevention is better than screening, however known contributors to cancer such as smoking, vaping, and asbestos are NOT banned in the US.
 - Public housing subsidizes businesses -it does not subsidize tenants. Low wages are only possible if public housing is available. NYCHA residents also include our first responders. The same people who live in NYCHA are the ones who are taking care of us during COVID. There are false narratives about NYCHA residents and it's easy to put the problems of NYCHA on them.
 - Problems observed with NYCHA housing include water damage that results from infrastructure problems or flooding. It results in peeling paint which can result in lead toxicity and mold which results in fungal infections.

- Recent studies include a 2020 report conducted by NYCHA residents and the Regional Planning Association called, “The Impacts of Living in NYCHA.”
 1. Link to report: <https://www.cvhaction.org/cvhnews/2020/7/6/the-impacts-of-living-in-nycha-needs-for-resident-health-in-the-rockaways-and-beyond>
 2. Topline results:
 - a. **81 percent of residents need immediate repairs to their apartments**, with more than half needing bathroom repairs and 45 percent needing kitchen repairs.
 - b. **One-quarter of residents say that living conditions directly affect their physical health**, with residents experiencing conditions ranging from asthma and other respiratory issues to central nervous system problems and chronic fatigue.
 - c. **One-third say that living conditions directly affect their mental health**, adding greatly to stress, depression, and other issues.
- 2018 NYS DOH Report on NYCHA, “Assessment of New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA)”
 1. Link: https://www.governor.ny.gov/sites/default/files/atoms/files/FINAL_Assessment_of_NYCHA_Report.pdf
 2. Report found that 83% of NYCHA apartments had a severe health hazard - mold, asbestos, lead, pest infestation, Second or Third hand smoking/inhalation
 3. After study, NYS did not appropriate money to NYCHA for repairs. Dr. Flores believes that the state knows about the problems and that people are getting hurt but aren’t incentivized to take action because of the belief that NYCHA residents are not electorally powerful.
 4. \$9.5B is needed to fix water damage and the cost is attributed to the structural nature of the remediations.
- Contact email: raja.flores@mtsinai.org

3. Q & A Session (Summarized and paraphrased)

- Q: What are the different parts of the solution - money, who profits from this. Whole construction industry can profit from keeping the buildings in repair.
 - RF: Problems include the following:
 1. Lack of government funding.
 2. Privatization of NYCHA. When profit is the goal, people don’t get taken care of. Not everything is pre-market - there is a part of the economy that is provided by the government.
 3. Not taking advantage of ground floor frontage. There are no businesses on the first floor of NYCHA. NYCHA could lease that space to bring in businesses that provide essential services to NYCHA residents and use the profits to fund repairs and help bring resources to housing
 4. Corruption. A lot of people assigned to fix NYCHA get paid but don’t actually do the work. Need someone to “round” on NYCHA starting with the sickest patient. Focus on the stuff that impacts people’s lives. Social programs like universal pre-K don’t work if you are filled with lead. If you fix NYCHA, you fix New York.
- Q: What do you do if you are living in NYCHA right now and have water damage?
 - RF: Air filter? Not much you can do if mold is coming from the ceiling.
- Q: I’ve been battling with NYCHA for the past 6 years. Based on Section 18, if renovation cost more than the demolition, then NYCHA can’t renovate and will need to tear down the building. This displaces the residents. I think it’s critical for NYCHA to purchase or rent motel/hotels while they demolish and rebuild. As a part of Rental Assistance Demonstration (RAD), I developed tenant protections. Politicians need to understand 24 CFR 964. Residents need to be trained for that regulation. The housing stock is old and needs to be replaced
 - RF: My concern with RAD is that a lot of people have been evicted under the demolition requirements.

- SIC: RAD has historically displaced people. When buildings are demolished, residents do not have the same protections under RAD conversions.
- Q: When problems occur in NYCHA housing, who do residents call?
 - SIC: There is a centralized number, and it has been difficult to get repairs done, especially during COVID when not many repairs occurred.
- Comment: NPD often goes with the lowest bidder and that impacts the quality of work. Focus on renovating current stock. Toronto housing is successful. Perhaps we can duplicate some of those efforts.
- Comment: Not One More Block is an autonomous anarchist network of people fighting gentrification. In the Ocean Bay development, 80 families were evicted because of RAD. We need to expand public housing v. privatizing it. Residents need to own those buildings and steward the land. That's where we should be - self-actualization. The worst landlord in NYC is NYCHA, #1 every year. If housing is a human right, it needs to be de-commodified. A lot of people say that but don't believe this.
- Comment: I am an essential worker living in NYCHA. The number for repairs is: 718-70-7701. You put in a complaint, sometimes they help, sometimes they do a half job. I needed an emergency transfer because of living conditions, but it's hard because domestic violence cases take priority. I don't want to feel like an animal. I was in a shelter for 2 years before NYCHA and I would rather live in a shelter than in my home.
- Q: Are any cities in the country doing this right? Internationally? Systems in place need to be thought out better because you can have the money, but not deliver the repairs that are needed.
 - SIC: Resident management Corp, a structure in which residents manage their own buildings, works. We can take over our building, collect the rents, hire the staff to clean and repair. Even if we find solutions that work, NYCHA makes decisions without us at the table. A resident should be the NYCHA chair. Who knows what's best for us than us?
- Comment: NYCHA residents don't have the same rights as non-NYCHA residents. For example, we can't complain to 311.
- Comment: One of my neighbors was mopping our own halls with a newborn and I was filling in holes myself, because we couldn't get NYCHA to respond. The person responsible for fixing the heat wouldn't do it. I had an electrical fire, and they broke my wall to do repairs and left a hole. We patched it up ourselves. This happened in July, and it still wasn't fixed.
- Q: Is any infrastructure money going to NYCHA housing?
 - SIC: Based on a seminar on Saturday, it doesn't look good for public housing.

4. Resolution:

WHEREAS, the EPA defines environmental justice as the “fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income, with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies” and is characterized by having “the same degree of protection from environmental and health hazards” and “equal access to the decision-making process to have a healthy environment in which to live, learn, and work,” we believe that it is a form of social justice,

WHEREAS, NYCHA residents are our neighbors, and many are first responders who continue to serve our NYC community through COVID, and we are concerned that NYCHA disrepair exposes or exacerbates health conditions among these members of our community. We also acknowledge there is disparities in housing protections between NYCHA residents and non-NYCHA residents,

WHEREAS, public health evidence has established that prevention is cheaper and more effective than treatment, we should apply the same philosophy to housing. However, we have let the health of our NYCHA buildings deteriorate, and consequently this impacts the health of NYCHA residents. We believe that the solution to this harm is to commit to a serious course of “treatment” while implementing a “prevention plan” to remediate NYCHA building repairs,

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, we call upon the NYC Council, State legislature, and Congress to prioritize and fully fund NYCHA housing and renovations such that the housing is modernized, and negative health impacts are minimized.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, we call on **Governor Hochul**, the incoming NYC **mayor**, **NYCHA**, and **NYC administration** to address the following urgent issues:

- NYCHA residents are the best experts of their needs and NYCHA should partner with residents to initiate, direct, and implement the future of NYCHA initiatives. Residents must be empowered to lead and meaningfully integrated in any major decision making, in addition to the CCOP-RAB,
- The next NYCHA Commissioner should have lived experience with NYCHA housing.
- Prioritize the oversight, monitoring, and enforcement of NYCHA regulations and housing law, including NYCHA's legal responsibility to respond to tickets within 24 hours and complete work as soon as possible to return homes to habitability,
- Implement the recommendations of NYCHA Federal Monitor Bart M. Schwartz as detailed in the reports on the federal monitor's website, <https://nychamonitor.com/>.
- Prioritize and fully fund NYCHA housing and renovations such that the housing is modernized, and negative health impacts are minimized by starting with the buildings producing the greatest harm.
- Transform ground floor space for commercial purposes to provide residents with needed services and use the profits to support residential programs and repairs.
- Keep people housed when renovations are happening and do not displace them as we believe in the principle that communities need to be kept together,
- Change NYCHA regulations so residents' rights are honored and afforded the same rights as any other tenant.
- Transition to resident management cooperation model for tenant groups that choose to do so.
- Fund training NYCHA residents on their rights under 24 CFR 964.
- Properly sequence repair work to ensure its efficacy, send out appropriate service providers for the problem (competence), and appropriately conduct all NYCHA building inspections and fully inspect individual apartments before they are transitioned.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, we call on the incoming Manhattan District Attorney to hold NYCHA accountable to the law and investigate corruption and violations of law,

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, corruption, audit NYCHA expenditures, and hold vendors and contractors to NYCHA accountable for their contracts.

Motion approved (7-0-0, 1 public member in favor): Lori Bores, Loraine Brown, Sarah Chu, Saundrea I. Coleman, Valerie Mason, Greg Morris, Russell Squire, and Wendy Machever (Public Member).

5. Old Business - None

6. New Business - None

Saundrea I. Coleman and Sarah Chu, Co-Chairs