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The City of New York
Community Board 8 Manhattan
Housing Committee
Thursday, May 5, 2022 – 6:30PM
Conducted Remotely on Zoom

Minutes

Board Members Present: Saundra I. Coleman, Billy Freeland, Ed Hartzog, Rebecca Lamorte, Gregory J. Morris, and Rita Popper.

Ms. Lamorte, Mr. Hartzog and Mr. Morris welcomed CB8 members and community members to the meeting.

(Council Member Alexis Alives, Chair of the Public Housing Committee was scheduled to speak. She was unable to attend. The Committee hopes to reschedule her soon.)

Ms. Lamorte expressed the desire of the Committee Chairs to build on the last meeting and hold the city accountable for its efforts to meet the needs of public housing. The proposed approach is for the committee to produce a statement of principles from the perspective of the Committee and Community Board 8 (CB8) that can be agreed upon and acted on. The Committee also seeks to hold our elected leaders accountable and receive real time feedback from NYCHA.

Mr. Morris added that the prospect of CB8 establishing a strategy, a plan and a series of expectations to support residents of public housing and seek as a Community Board to hold the city accountable requires significant and on-going engagement with residents and elected officials, and (likely) other community boards. A city-wide community board coalition could put pressure on elected officials at a city and state level. The data matter and tonight is the first step toward gathering that data.

Mr. Hartzog expressed his enthusiasm for several new members of the City Council who can support this effort and together we can bring new energy and urgency.

Ms. Coleman, CB member and co-founder of Holmes-Isaacs coalition, expressed a desire for the committee to do a better job of reaching out to residents to participate in the committee meetings. She also emphasized that the systemic behavior of management will need to be overhauled for repairs to improve and be provided consistently. Funding is needed too. She has and continues to take an active role in helping her neighbors access services that should initiate repairs in the Isaacs Houses and Holmes Towers.

Ms. Coleman added that timing of repairs as well as accessibility to the online/phone repair portals were issues that needed to be altered/improved. She also asked us to address the following questions: How are the tickets that are not being closed handled? Why does a ticket get closed if the repair work remains undone – or the tenant in need of repair is not home?

Ms. Coleman clarified aspects of the process that is used to communicate a need for apartment repair in public housing:

“Basically, you call the 718 number, the Central Call Center, and you tell them your complaint, or you do it through your app. And usually they say 24 hours, depending on what it is, if there's a stoppage or something like that... something very simple, yeah, they come out. But when it comes to plastering or any type of determination, major leaks, that takes a long time.”

Ms. Coleman also noted the impact of the federal monitorship, as federal monitor investigators have been at her home as well.

Ms. Taylor, co-founder of the Holmes-Isaacs coalition, provided additional clarity on work orders (or tickets) and highlighted issues with dates for repair/response:

“You have to pick a date. So if you pick a date so people who work, they'll pick a date and they'll pick the afternoon because they know that they can get the time off in the afternoon. They'll pick like a Friday afternoon. But if it's a slow day, management will send the maintenance worker ahead of time because they have nothing to do and they're working. So they're knocking on your door and they'll call you because that's something new as well, where they didn't do that before. So they'll call you and they say, Well, I'm at your door. And the person will say, Well, that's not when I scheduled my ticket. You're scheduling your ticket when you know you're going to be home because you need this work done. And they say, Well, I'm going to close it because I'm here. That's not okay.”

Ms. Taylor also pointed out the discrepancies between when a resident has identified the timing of the submission of a ticket and NYCHA's awareness of when the ticket was submitted. She also expressed awareness of instances when it has been communicated that if residents were “nice” to NYCHA personnel they might get assistance more quickly.

Mr. Morris requested that the committee add to its set of accountability expectations a statement from NYCHA (or rubric) regarding the prioritization of tickets depending on service type.

There was a brief conversation about issues that can be resolved quickly as opposed to ones that are related to significant structural ones.

Ms. Coleman noted the decades and decades of neglect. She also pointed to the concerns about the management of public housing funds and the history of systemic racism in U.S. housing policies.

Mr. Morris emphasized a desire to be granular in identifying and assessing the specific elements and data points that would help the committee to understand and track progress on apartment/building repair:

- What is the process for putting in tickets for repair?
- How do residents know this process?
- How are repairs prioritized?
- What is the current/anticipated timeline of repair per type of repair?

Ms. Lamorte shared her framing of the questions that the committee should think about:

- What are the things we don't know that we want to know?
- What are the things that we want to hold the city accountable for in reporting to us on a regular basis?
- What is it that we just are not clear about?
- What's the expectation?
- Does anybody ask about quality? Things are getting closed. Why? How

Mr. Hartzog asked for the committee to investigate and share any data or reports that have been produced by elected officials (Comptroller's Office) regarding NYCHA repairs.

Ms. Coleman reiterated the need for funding.

Ms. Popper expressed her concerns for her neighbors and encouraged the committee to act quickly and aggressively to address these issues.

Mr. Galil encouraged the committee to use social media.

Ms. Taylor emphasized that basic apartment repairs cannot address systemic issues like issues with boilers or roofs.

Ms. Popper asked the committee to secure a listing of all the apartment repairs issues in the Holmes-Isaacs development. The committee learned that some of this data may be accessible.

Ms. Coleman provided a summary of the efforts that she and other tenant organizers including Ms. Taylor made to gather information about apartment issues in advance of the legal action against NYCHA. This information may be slightly out of date.

Mr. Morris shared his desire for CB8 to rally – as a board – in support of residents and the Holmes-Isaacs Coalition organizers to secure this data in the future.

There was some debate about the value of a letter to NYCHA to begin responding to some of the issues that were discussed at this meeting.

The co-chairs committed to the following:

- Producing a letter to be submitted to the appropriate contacts that identified the data the committee required to understand and track NYCHA’s progress making repairs
- Working with Holmes-Isaacs coalition to secure up-to-date information about repair needs in the development
- Beginning outreach to other community boards with public housing committees
- Researching/reviewing reports for elected officials related to NYCHA work orders

Following the above, specific action steps can be taken by the committee and the Board.

Ms. Machaver noted the importance of confidentiality as we capture data about residents and apartment and asked that we remain respectful to NYCHA workers who are doing the best they can and would not be considered “decision-makers.”

Mr. Hartzog noted how slow the legal system can be in providing relief. He reminded us how urgent these issues are.

As there were no more reflections or questions, Ms. Lamorte, Mr. Hartzog, and Mr. Morris expressed their gratitude for the participation of CB members and non-CB members on today’s call.

The motion to adjourn was made and seconded.

Edward Hartzog, Gregory Morris, and Rebecca Lamorte, Co-Chairs