

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
Housing Committee**
Thursday, June 2, 2022 – 6:30PM
Conducted Remotely on Zoom

Minutes

Board Members Present: Saundrea I. Coleman, Lindsey Cormack, Billy Freeland, Ed Hartzog, Rebecca Lamorte, Gregory J. Morris, Rita Popper and Marco Tamayo.

Item 1: Guest Speaker: Nicholas Dagen Bloom, Professor of Urban Policy and Planning at Hunter College. <https://www.hunterurban.org/faculty/nicholas-dagen-bloom>. Professor Bloom will provide his thoughts on the state of public housing in NYC.

Co-chairs Mr. Hartzog and Mr. Morris welcomed CB8 members and community members to the meeting.

Mr. Morris welcomed presenter Nicholas Dagen Bloom, Professor of Urban Policy and Planning at Hunter College. His research analyzes long-term planning outcomes in essential urban systems such as subsidized housing and mass transportation. Professor Bloom has been quoted extensively on housing and other topics in media outlets including WNYC, The New York Times, CNN, and The Washington Post. As a frequent contributor to *Gotham Gazette*, he has written extensively on issues related to public housing.

Mr. Bloom discussed the difference between public housing in New York City as opposed to other cities in terms of the scale, the quality and kind of the vision. He referenced the people who were behind public housing like Mary Simkovich. She was one of the founders of the Housing Authority. In our city's history, housing conditions in New York City were awful. The housing reform community wanted to see higher standards for housing. For decades, there were tenement laws which improved the tenements. They didn't stop the creation of tenements, but each generation of tenements after 1901 got a little bit higher quality. The Great Depression is the watershed for public housing in New York.

City owned land is used to build public housing. Eminent domain is used extensively to take property from private owners. They used federal funds, but there was also a city public housing program which would basically use the rents of tenants to basically finance the housing.

By the late 1950s, its majority non-white population in public housing, and certainly in the sixties, almost a very high percentage of the white population left for the suburbs or other housing because they didn't face the kind of restrictions in the private market that Black and Hispanic families did in this period.

In the late 1960s, much like we have today, there was essentially a homeless crisis, but people were put in what were called "welfare hotels." There was enormous pressure to change who could live in public housing.

Much of NYC's portfolio was built in a 20-year period and it's so big that in this sort of era of late nineties and into the early 2000, you basically needed a lot of money to recapitalize and rebuild these buildings.

Public housing funding has declined nationally

There remained her a moralistic, paternalistic approach to managing families and people- an emphasis on rent collection at all as a primary goal. At the same time, there were some really nice things about what might I think added to the city in terms of greenery. When we look today where most of the tree canopy in a lot of neighborhoods, you have the trees that were planted, the lawns, the apartments themselves, when well maintained.

The average monthly rent is \$550 on average. The average family income of \$24,000.

There is a contrast between like Manhattan public housing buildings which are much higher density than the outer boroughs.

Mr. Morris asked what public housing is like now as opposed to the past. Mr. Bloom contributed the following:

- There is no equivalent federal program to invest in public housing. And the reason is that in other American cities, public housing is no longer an important program. They either destroyed their developments, or they put them under RAD or the Rental Assistance Demonstration Program is basically under private sector management.
- There's very little public housing left in New York State, outside of New York City, and much of that has been redeveloped across the board. So, it's hard, even at the state level to get any funding. And then at the city level, the mayoral programs have all emphasized either preservation of the public private or public private partnership developments like Mitchel- Lama.
- The only reason the city provides any money now is because the federal government, HUD, stepped in. 50 years ago it was a real estate operation. It's not a real estate operation anymore.

Mr. Morris noted that the Public Housing Preservation Trust passed the legislature in New York State. Mr. Bloom explained that it could basically bring in enormous amounts of investment into renovating and then having basically a public manager, as opposed to RAD or PACT, where you basically turn it over to private sector for development and then management.

Ms. Coleman referenced a piece in *The City* from February 2021 that she and Mr. Bloom was featured in. She shared her lived experience in the piece. She highlighted the reality that public housing residents were low to moderate income people. It includes civil servants, schoolteachers, police officers, etc. She reminded the committee of the disinvestment right from the city, state and federal government in public housing and the impact of white flight.

Mr. Bloom shared that 13% of public housing residents are on public assistance. About over 40 some percent are working families. He agreed with Ms. Coleman's statements about the range of income- about \$24,000 on average across the system - and the racialized component that has resulted in

disinvestment. When public housing was primarily white in the 1930s, it was a very well-funded program. The developments were built to high quality standards. There were some housing police.

Mr. Bloom referenced the very large senior population in public housing. It is very often overlooked how crucial public housing is for seniors.

Ms. Popper asked who is responsible for NYCHA.

Mr. Bloom indicated that there is a federal oversight now. There is a legal office. If you're interested in reading hard-hitting reports on NYCHA, go to the Federal Monitorship documents. They do monthly analysis of what's going on internally and it's public. It's a creature of the federal government. The truth is there's enormous roof replacements that have been done. There are enormous boilers. it's also the scale problem. It's constant Band-Aid.

Mr. Galil asked what will happen if the money for NYCHA doesn't come? And how is that more people will take seriously the problems in NYCHA?

Mr. Bloom reminded the committee that there's 250,000 families on the NYCHA waiting list. The average tenancy in public housing is 24 years. The vacancy rate is 1.9 or 2%.

Ms. Lynch asked about how to address the slow-motion inertia of NYCHA.

Ms. Taylor described aspect of her experience living in NYCHA and expressed her feeling about NYCHA having squandered so much of its money. She emphasized the issues that exist in private partnership and drew the committee's attention to the Faircloth Amendment.

Mr. Tamayo asked for a definition of affordable housing. Mr. Bloom provided some detail about the beneficiaries of housing programs and how that has changed overtime. He stressed that there is a definition on the federal level, which is still the main source of all housing policy in the United States. There are mixed income models too and a range of income levels within a building. This led to a brief discussion about capital and the accessibility to capital.

Mr. Bloom closed the meeting by sharing his thoughts about the challenge that exist in New York maintaining such a large portfolio of publicly supported housing. We have the largest Section Eight program in the country, and it requires the investment of federal officials, elected officials from New York State, and New York City officials. He hoped to come back to discuss Mitchell-Lama.

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

Item 2: Old Business

No Old Business was brought up.

Item 3: New Business

No New Business was brought up.

The motion to adjourn was made and seconded.