

BRONX COMMUNITY BOARD NO. 8

**MINUTES OF THE HOUSING COMMITTEE MEETING
HELD ON JANUARY 25, 2016
AT AMERICAN LEGION POST 775
3035 CORLEAR AVENUE, BRONX NY 10463**

Board Members Present:

Paul Ellis
Lenora Croft
Noah Friedman
David Gellman
David Kornbluh
Omar Murray
Amy Joy Robateau
Lucy Mercado
Ruby Palma

Affiliation:

CB8 Housing Committee, Chairman
CB8 Housing Committee
CB8 Housing Committee
CB8 Housing Committee
CB8 Housing Committee
CB8 Housing Committee
CB8 Housing Committee
CB8 Community Committee Member
CB8 Community Committee Member

Guests:

Robert Knapp

Director of Heating Management and
Services Unit, New York City Housing
Authority (NYCHA)

Nathaniel Parris
Brian Honan

Administrator, NYCHA
Director of State and City Legislative
Affairs, NYCHA

Paulette Shomo

President, Marble Hill Houses
Tenant's Association (TA)

Tony Edwards
Carmen Mercado
Barbara Lauray
John Sims

Vice President, Marble Hill Houses TA
President, Fort Independence Houses TA
Vice President, Fort Independence Houses TA
Community resident

Absent:

Sergio Marquez
Leonel Baez
Anthony Creaney
Margaret Donato
James Rather
Julie Reyes
Georgia Santiago

CB8 Housing Committee, Vice Chairman
CB8 Housing Committee
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The meeting was called to order at 7:43 PM.

Paul Ellis, Chair of the Housing Committee, welcomed the attendees and introduced himself. Mr. Ellis then went on to review the agenda for the evening.

1. Current Issues at Marble Hill Houses and Fort Independence/Bailey Houses

Mr. Ellis stated the goal of the meeting was to have representatives from NYCHA address the concerns from the Tenant's Associations (TA) from both Marble Hill and Fort Independence. Mr. Ellis noted the perennial issues of garbage on the grounds and in the buildings, inadequate janitorial services, inadequate maintenance and security concerns, and noted that the CB8 Housing Committee had been addressing these issues for at least the last four years. Mr. Ellis made mention of the three well-attended town hall meetings held at Marble Hill and at Fort Independence as well as another committee meeting on the subject last June. At the same time, he noted that these concerns were due, at least in part, to inadequate funding for NYCHA.

Ms. Paulette Shomo commended NYCHA for attending to the concerns (inadequate heat, sanitation and maintenance) put forth at the last TA meeting. She noted that heat had been reinstated. Ms. Shomo specifically commended and thanked Mr. Nathaniel Parris for personally checking on residents, especially the seniors. Mr. Tony Edwards expressed his pleasure with the unusually high attendance at the recent Marble Hill TA meeting.

Mr. Brian Honan thanked the Marble Hill TA for their appreciation for the work being done to address the issues at Marble Hill, and for holding the meetings that have proven to be a valuable source of feedback.

Ms. Barbra Lauray stated that there is a lack of attention and communication from the NYCHA employees onsite. She explained that Fort Independence had been without heat for two extended periods over the last month, and that it seemed that the only time that any quick action was taken to address the matter was after she had been in touch with CB8. She thanked the board and its staff for their assistance in getting the heat issues addressed.

Mr. Robert Knapp mentioned that the heat disturbance on the C-line at Fort Independence, around January 19th, was due to a broken part (a trap) that took time to be located, ordered and shipped. Mr. Knapp stated that 100% of the traps will be attended to this year and portable boilers will be utilized if an issue occurs again. He will set up "meet and greets" with the TAs at Marble Hill and Fort Independence.

Ms. Lauray disputed the heat measurements taken by NYCHA staff at Fort Independence. Mr. Knapp explained that measurements of the temperature were collected randomly by his staff, and results showed readings of around 68 to 69 degrees. However, Ms. Lauray reported that she had taken measurements on the other side of the building, where she resides, that read 44 to 47 degrees. Ms. Lauray claimed that the higher readings recorded by NYCHA were due in part to the residual heat from residents using their kitchen ovens as a heating source.

Ms. Lauray also made mention of the deplorable and dangerous condition of the ceiling at the Fort Independence Community Center. Mr. Honan explained that there was limited funding for brick and roof work. The NYCHA plan presented for fixing roofs was apparently rejected at the state level, and he is unsure of the status of roof replacement. At the request of Mr. Ellis, he committed to respond as to the current plan/schedule for roof, brick and boiler work at Fort Independence and Marble Hill.

Mr. Ellis noted the pattern of problems with janitorial services and maintenance, pointing out that the issues at Fort Independence and Marble Hill seem to be best addressed only after NYCHA is asked to appear before the CB8 Housing Committee, and he stated that attention to maintenance needed to be sustained on a more consistent basis. Mr. Ellis went on to say that although attention to these issues is sporadic and inconsistent, the current administration at NYCHA does appear to be more committed to long-term change.

Mr. Parris reported that NYCHA is seeking long-term solutions to all the issues we have been addressing. He noted, and Mr. Honan concurred, that lack of staffing is one of the fundamental problems. They are currently working to restore full caretaker staffing of 15 people at Marble Hill from the current level of 12 and are developing a work plan to better address janitorial issues.

Mr. Honan noted that staffing has always been an issue due to budget, promotions and turnover. Mr. Ellis suggested having a pool of floating caretakers to address what seems to be a systemic problem, but Mr. Honan noted that such a mechanism would require funding that NYCHA currently does not have.

Mr. Ellis noted that with respect to garbage, it was a two-fold problem, one side being having enough caretakers to pick up garbage on a regular basis. The other side relates to tenant behavior in leaving garbage in front of the buildings rather than putting it down the garbage chutes. Mr. Ellis asked if NYCHA had the enforcement tools it needed to act against tenants who improperly leave garbage in front of the buildings. The NYCHA representatives noted that penalizing tenants for bad conduct was difficult.

Mr. Ellis then asked if NYCHA and the TAs would support an initiative for officers from the 50th Precinct to give tickets to residents who they observed were leaving household trash in front of the building. All of the NYCHA representatives and TA representatives present said they would be in favor of such an initiative.

Mr. Gellman noted that it seems that the issues of most concern to the tenants relate to operational matters, while the solutions that are proposed are very often based on increased capital spending. Mr. Honan stated that the reality is that additional operational funding can be more difficult to obtain than capital funding.

Mr. Honan offered to give a tour of the boiler room at Fort Independence to the members of the Housing Committee, which will be organized by committee member Amy Joy Robateau.

2. Old Business

Mr. Ellis thanked the committee for the work done on the Affordable Housing Forum on December 9, 2015. He then asked for feedback from the members present about the event, which was followed by a discussion regarding the December forum and thoughts for the second forum to be held in March.

3. New Business

Mr. Ellis distributed several copies of the draft Senior Resource Guide for Community Board 8, prepared by the Aging Committee, and asked for committee members who would like to work on a similar guide for housing issues. Noah Friedman suggested that one way to arrange the content of such a guide would be to consider the “lifecycle” of a typical tenant, from application to acceptance to addressing landlord-tenant problems. The following members agreed to participate in the project: Mr. Ellis, Lucy Mercado, Lenora Croft, Ruby Palma, Ms. Robateau and Mr. Friedman, with Ms. Robateau and Mr. Friedman indicating that they might have some limitations in their ability to be fully active in the project.

There being no further business before the Committee, the meeting was adjourned at 9:47 p.m.

Minutes recorded by,

Lenora Croft, Housing Committee Member
Amy Joy Robateau, Housing Committee Member

Respectfully submitted,

Paul Ellis
Chairperson
Housing Committee, CB8