

IMPACT AWARD FOR PLANNING

RESIDENT REVIEW COMMITTEE FOR FULTON & ELLIOTT-CHELSEA HOUSES

TENANT ASSOCIATION PRESIDENTS DARLENE WATERS & MIGUEL ACEVEDO



Fulton and Elliott-Chelsea Houses residents made history as the first group of NYCHA residents to lead a PACT planning process, which included the PACT proposal review and developer selection for the preservation of 2,054 apartments within Fulton, Chelsea, Chelsea Addition, and Elliott Houses.

For decades, despite having expert knowledge of their housing needs, public housing residents across the country have been largely left out of the decision-making process about the future of their homes. Traditionally, NYCHA has provided its residents with forums to obtain information and address concerns. This degree of involvement was enough to say that residents were heard but did not result in shifting priorities or modifying plans based on the resident feedback.

In 2019, NYCHA released a preservation plan for Fulton Houses, Elliott Houses, Chelsea Houses, & Chelsea Addition to address their collective \$366M in repairs needs. NYCHA's plan called for the developments to transition to Section 8 through PACT and proposed the demolition of two residential buildings on the Fulton campus, temporary relocation of their residents, and the construction of a new residential building on the campus. Though it lacked resident input and garnered vocal opposition from both residents and advocates, the plan seemed poised for approval—another decision made on behalf of NYCHA residents rather than with or by residents.

Remarkably, NYCHA and City Hall decided to discard the plan and embrace a new approach, working with and empowering residents to develop and shape their own future. During the fall of 2019, a Chelsea Working Group was established, comprised of Fulton & Elliott-Chelsea residents, elected officials, Community Board 4 representatives, housing advocates, NYCHA, and the Mayor's Office. After assessing a variety of funding and rehabilitation strategies, the group collectively determined that a PACT conversion would provide the single largest source of funds, covering over two-thirds of the total project cost, to invest in the developments' capital needs.

After 18 months of weekly meetings, the Chelsea Working Group released a final report outlining residents' priorities and three key recommendation areas: address the full capital needs of the four developments, safeguard and expand the rights and protections for existing and future residents of the Chelsea NYCHA developments, and establish clear, consistent, and accountable engagement methods to give residents real decision-making power in the renovation of their homes. Enacting this last recommendation would mark the first time in our city and nation's history that public housing residents exert real influence on the future of their homes.

*(opposite page)
Resident Review
Committee deliberates
over the selection of a new
development partner*

*(at right)
Rendering of the renovat-
ed campus for Fulton and
Elliott-Chelsea Houses by
Essence Development
and Related Companies*



Acknowledging that residents are those most impacted by a preservation plan, the Working Group recommended that NYCHA directly involve residents in the PACT process including RFP development, evaluation, and the selection process. During RFP development, Chelsea NYCHA residents introduced new parameters and score weights, setting the terms and expectations for the coming proposals and development teams who could potentially become their partner. To elevate the importance of property management and on-going resident engagement, the residents developed a new 30-question property management questionnaire required of all RFP respondents that focused on quality and service rather than the technical aspects of property management that had been the focus of previous PACT RFPs.

Once RFP responses were received, tenant leaders formed the Fulton and Elliott-Chelsea Houses Resident Review Committee to evaluate the proposals, interview development teams, and ultimately select the team best suited to meet the needs of Fulton & Elliott-Chelsea. The committee consisted of 10 members from across the Fulton and Elliott-Chelsea campuses who met twice weekly for three months, devoting hundreds of volunteer-hours to assess developer proposals. The Resident Review Committee had in-depth discussions about proposed building upgrades, management practices, security plans, and design features, and plans to enhance social services.

With a deep understanding of each proposal gained from months of analysis and interviews with each development team, the Fulton & Elliott-Chelsea Resident Review Committee made history and chose to partner with Essence Development and Related Companies on the fulfillment of over \$366 million in capital needs. For the first time, NYCHA residents oversaw every single step of the development and selection process. Fulton and Elliott-Chelsea proved again that no one understands the needs of public housing developments like its residents. This project serves as a national model for future public-private partnerships and demonstrates the power of leveraging residents' expertise and decision-making with the resources of the affordable housing industry.



DARLENE WATERS serves as the Resident Association President of Elliott-Chelsea Houses representing over 2,376 residents. Since moving into Elliott Houses during 1955, Ms. Waters has devoted her life to supporting and serving her community. For 41 years, Ms. Waters worked as an assistant teacher at the Head Start Early Childhood Education center located on the Elliott-Chelsea campus, nurturing and educating generation after generation of the children in her community. Now, in her role as Resident Association President, Ms. Waters' weekly schedule is jammed packed with meetings about how to improve the services

residents receive and their housing quality. Her commitment stems from a deep desire to help the residents in her community with tangible results. Ms. Waters looks forwards to the improved housing quality and safety that residents will receive through PACT and their partnership with Essence and Related Companies. She attests that elevating resident voices and decision-making during the planning process has been and will continue to be the key to a successful PACT conversion. "Residents live here. This is their home. They should have a direct say in everything about their homes and neighborhood, and they know better than anyone else." In addition to being Resident Association President, Ms. Waters serves as a board member for the Holy Apostles Church and the Hudson Guild.



MIGUEL ACEVEDO is the President of the Fulton Houses Residents Association, representing over 2,103 residents. A resident of Fulton Houses since the 1960s, Miguel is a committed advocate for Fulton residents and residents of other lower Manhattan NYCHA developments. When residents are frustrated and need assistance they reach out to Miguel. Whether an issue requires persistent outreach to NYCHA or partnership with community organizations, Miguel is committed to finding solutions for residents. Mr. Acevedo is an accomplished leader; he has expedited housing condition improvements in response

to tenant concerns, secured funding for Fulton capital projects, facilitated meal distribution during the pandemic, and worked to bring a pop-up vaccine site to Fulton Houses' Community Center. Miguel welcomes partnership with Essence Development and Related Companies and thinks the PACT process marks an important milestone in Fulton Houses' history. For too long residents have dealt with deplorable conditions, but now they have a seat at the table and will shape their own future. Miguel has played an instrumental role in ensuring a wide range of resident voices continue to be heard during the PACT planning process. In addition to Resident Association President, Miguel Acevedo is the Executive Director of Fulton Youth for the Future, co-founder of Afford Chelsea, an alumnus of Community Board 4 having served for 10 years, and a lead organizer responsible for the 2009 passage of Leandra's Law.