

Transcript: Mayor Eric Adams, HUD, NYCHA Complete \$434 Million Comprehensive Renovation of Nine Public Housing Developments

May 20, 2022

Jessica Katz, New York City Chief Housing Officer: Good morning, everyone. And thank you so much, Simon. I'm excited to be here with you today. Celebrating these NYCHA homes that finally reflect what residents deserve. For too long, NYCHA residents have suffered, but having the TA leaders here with us today is a testament to how the Brooklyn PACT bundle has reset relationships and given more than 6,000 New Yorkers homes they can finally be proud of. I want to congratulate Archer, Omni, Debar and Bed-Stuy Restoration for their great work, as well as NYCHA for their commitment to find creative ways to do better for residents.

Katz: One of the many things that makes New York so great is that we have the loudest and the most active tenant advocates in the city. So when NYCHA first started contemplating the RAD Program, we didn't just take it as it is. We made sure that residents were at the table to codify the rights and protections they would get alongside the repairs that they desperately needed. As you've heard from some of the tenants and Mr. Gross in particular, 7,000 windows, three miles of copper pipe, we've been expecting our tenant leaders to become experts in mold remediation, and property management, and lead paint regulations and I want to get us to a place where the developments here at NYCHA are in a place where the tenants can go back to living their lives, and taking care of your families and not have to be those kind of experts anymore, but also to use that expertise to move these projects forward.

Katz: So we've continued to strengthen the voice of residents and give them more choice since the first PACT project six years ago. But one thing that is clear since the beginning is these results that you see today. These homes are beautiful, a place that any one of us would be proud to live in and what makes them even better, half a billion

dollars of work that has been taking place across this bundle was completed in two years on schedule, despite a global pandemic. And NYCHA needs new resources, they need new partners and new tools. We have a long road ahead of us to get every NYCHA apartment to look as great as these, but with our PACT partners and hopefully the NYCHA Trust legislation in Albany. And most importantly, the residents standing by us, we will get there. Congratulations to everyone for their incredible work on this project, you gave thousands of residents pride in their homes back. Thank you.

[Applause]

[...]

Jonathan Gouveia, Executive Vice President, NYCHA Real Estate

Development: Thank you, Simon. And thank you to everyone for coming today to celebrate the completion of over \$400 million in comprehensive repairs to over 2,600 apartments across nine developments and 37 buildings. Thanks to the hard work of our PACT partners and our residents family at Armstrong, Berry Street, Independence Towers, Marcy Avenue, Green Avenue, 572 Warren, Weeksville and Williams Plaza, now have, as you've heard, fully rehabilitated, safe, clean, and beautiful homes to live in while continuing to enjoy the same important resident rights and protections that they had under the Section 9 program. Thanks to our tenant association presidents Mrs. Brown, Ms. Davis, Mr. Gross, Mr. Guttman and Ms. Legions who kicked us off today to celebrate the exciting moment for all the residents that live in the nine developments in this project.

Gouveia: I know it was a lot of work during this extremely challenging set of times to get to this moment, but without your collaboration and your constant dedication, we wouldn't be here today. And thanks to the PACT partner team, which you also know by now is consists of Arker Companies, Omni New York, Debar Development Bed-Stuy Restoration, your vision for and commitment to this rehabilitation was impressive from the start, and it is evident in the quality of the work that you've completed, your ability to complete this massive project on time during a global pandemic, and the respectful and professional approach you took to addressing resident and stakeholder issues as everyone has heard today. I know people will enjoy seeing the finished work on this tour.

Gouveia: I'd also like to thank the electeds who are here today, as well as HDC and other city partners and to HUD for your continued support of the PACT program. It's an honor to show Mayor Adams, Chief Housing Officer Jessica Katz, HDC President Eric Enderlin, and HUD Regional Administrator, Alicka Ampry-Samuel, this development today. And a big thank you to the NYCHA team who spent countless hours making sure this development came to fruition. While the real estate department leads these efforts, our PACT work touches almost every department at NYCHA, and so I want to thank the entire NYCHA team.

Gouveia: The full scope and investments made to these nine develop elements is vast and comprehensive and includes the replacement, and modernization of elevators, plumbing, roofs, windows, facades, security systems, common areas, community spaces, and playgrounds, and of course, new kitchens and bathrooms. And as you heard from Mr. Guttman, critically the boilers. It's a shame that at Independence, they had to rely on a temporary boiler for almost 10 years but as you heard those days are over with steady, reliable heat.

[Applause]

Gouveia: This project also included investments in sustainability, such as solar panels at four of the nine developments, and enhanced programming, including new computer labs, technology programming, a new Kasparov chess program, as well as social services and onsite case management. While we are here to celebrate the significant investments in these communities, I wanted to spend a few moments highlighting the importance of resident engagement, which of course you've also heard about here today. Residents really did help us improve every aspect of this. For example, in 2019, prior to this conversion, I and other members of the NYHA team spent many hours working with our tenant leaders to clarify many aspects of the project and to provide assurances on various deal points. We even changed and improved many aspects of our resident lease based on comments from Mr. Gross.

Gouveia: Another example, and you heard about the sewage issues at Berry Street, Ms. Legions was a passionate advocate and made sure that we addressed that issue right away. And I can say that right upon the closing, the development team very immediately went to rebuilding the drainage and sewer system. And as you heard those drainage issues, among other issues ,that were resolved right within the last two years. Last summer, Ms. Legion's invited us to see her finished development. And the

transformation was incredible. In addition to the beautiful apartments, lobbies and community spaces, Ms. Legions, and all of the residents at Berry Street no longer have to deal with those sewage backups.

[Applause]

Gouveia: In addition, the development team and residents work closely together to make sure that each household received the individual attention it deserved, and to make sure building upgrades were responsive to different cultural and religious needs. This type of partnership and responsive design highlights the best of what a pro PACT program can provide to our communities.

Gouveia: In closing, I want to thank everyone for their partnership and commitment to this project. All PACT projects are extremely complicated. In this case, we had to deliver comprehensive repairs to over 6,000 residents during the peak of the pandemic, making this project even more complicated. As such, we could not have completed this project on time without strong partnerships between our residents, NYCHA and our PACT team. Today, we're making great progress toward converting 62,000 apartments through PACT with over 35,000 units, in some stage of the program. We learned a lot from this project, and we will continue to improve the program and bolster resident engagement as we bring more comprehensive repairs to more NYCHA communities across the city. So thank you, and congratulations once again to our residents and to Arker, Omni, Debar, Bed-Stuy Restoration for putting in an incredible amount of work to achieve it, stunning results for our residents. Thank you.

Mayor Eric Adams: [Inaudible]. Rabbi you just said it clear. Look at this, look at this, look at this.

[Applause]

Mayor Adams: So we can be intellectual, philosophical, theoretical, but this is how people were living. And what we are learning today, it's not the program, it's who implements the program. You could have the best program going, but if you have a bunch of shysters that think they're just going to steal the money of taxpayers and residents, then it's a terrible program. These programs could work and we have to move from a place of no to everything.

Mayor Adams: And put people on trial. When we campaign as elected officials, people tell us all the time, "We don't believe in you, politicians, you have a lot of talk, but you nowhere around." And what we have to do, we have to convince voters that we stand for something. This group of people here that did this project. Yes, NYCHA residents were burned, they were denied, they were betrayed, they were left behind, but you can't stay at no. One day you got to say yes. Because we said, yes, these residents moved from one state of living to another state of living. So it doesn't matter what the program is.

[Applause]

Mayor Adams: Generations after generation, we've been philosophical as elected officials while tenants, they were living like this while we were debating on how and why. We should have focused on one thing: get stuff done. I saw tenants asking, get it done.

Mayor Adams: And so I say, thank you to those who critique the situation. We're supposed to. We're supposed to hold the feet to the fire. We have a standard now that anyone who comes to stay, they're going to develop NYCHA. They need to look at this standard. This is our expectation. So if it doesn't matter, if it's the land trust, if it's RAD, no matter what it is, the bottom line is, it's the employees, and the entities and the partnerships that implement the program. You could have the best program possible, but if you don't have the right oversight and implementation, you're not going to get a qualitative product. And that's what we got here. And so now we need to have others. You got to live up to the standards. NYCHA residents deserve better, deserve better.

[Applause]

Mayor Adams: But this is a gut check moment and we have to be honest about this. This is a gut check moment. It's going to cost 30 plus billion dollars just in New York City. And you know what? It's not coming. It's not coming. Let's not lie about this. The federal government has tried with the Biden administration to push through legislation with Nydia Velazquez, Tommy Torres, all of our congressional delegations, they fought hard to get the 30 plus billion dollars here so we can finally do what was right. And it was decided from the other side of the aisle, "No, we're not giving it to NYCHA." So, that's our reality.

Mayor Adams: So what must we do? Either we can wallow in that despair and allow NYCHA residents to continue to live on the left, on the right side of that. Or we can say, "Let's become creative on how do we ensure we transform this?" Look at this, to this.

Mayor Adams: That's what my Chief Housing Officer is responsible in doing. You've been asking for this for the longest. We have to be creative in finding the solution to deal with NYCHA. The bugles you are hearing it is not the cavalry coming from Washington. It's taps being played that's saying, "NYCHA is dying." We walked through these apartments. We spoke to residents. We discussed this. It's time to make it happen now. That's what this moment is about. And so, the bus shouldn't be to anti-RAD. The bus should be bringing people here and say, "See the possibility. See the possibility."

[Applause]

Mayor Adams: That's what the bus should be now. See the possibility. And we know there's distrust. We know what people who lived in NYCHA have gone through. We know the fight with the tenant association leaders and president. We know it. We know it, but you elected a group of advocates that are pro-NYCHA. They're fighting on your behalf. Senator Salazar been talking about this for God knows how long. They're fighting on your behalf but now we got to get it done. That's it. Got to get it done. Four years later, I'm not going to be the mayor of this city when NYCHA is still in the condition that it's in. Can't happen. It can't happen. It's time to get it done. We're going to roll out our plan.

[Applause]

Mayor Adams: We're going to present it to you. But we're going to ask you, let's have trust. We got to start trusting somewhere. I don't know who made that record from car wash, "You got to believe in somebody. Why not believe in me?" Got to start, we got to believe in someone. It's time to believe in this, right here. It's time to start believing again. There's been a real abandonment of belief. It's time to start believing again, because if we don't believe again, we're never going to transform NYCHA. We're going to be back here again, talking about what NYCHA deserve and not spending this moment of giving them what they deserve. Let's make this happen.

[Applause]

Mayor Adams: We do off-topic [inaudible].

[...]

Question: Yeah. I just wondering if you're optimistic that the [inaudible] will be approved in Albany?

Mayor Adams: My job is to present to Albany, present to Washington D.C., give them all the facts. They go deliberate and they make the determination. That's the level of government we're in. I follow the rules of the level of government. We present it. If it's not the land trust, then I'm hoping they come up with how we fund this. Fixing NYCHA can't be a soundbite. It has to be how we fund it. So if we're not going to do land trust, if we're not going to do RAD, how we fund it. We need 30 something billion dollars, so we have to come up with a way to transform these apartments. So we presented our case in Albany, it's up to Albany to make the determination and I respect whatever decision that they come out with.

Question: Okay, you've talked about [inaudible] major, important component of [inaudible]. You've also talked about housing decline. You talked [inaudible] about rezoning swaths of Manhattan [inaudible]. Is that still on the table as well? On top of that, you've also [inaudible] staffing issues and [inaudible] limiting your ability to [inaudible]. Do you feel like, you are getting manpower to actually complete your whole plan?

Mayor Adams: We're doing a complete analysis of what we have been doing with housing. We're looking at why is it taking so long? Why are we retraumatizing people by having them tell the stories over and over again when we have the data? We are looking at what units are available. How many people have vouchers that are being ignored? So there's a complete analysis of the dysfunctionality of housing in this city. And I keep saying this; I know it's hard to believe, but I've been here for only five months. I know it feels like that I've been the mayor for five years, but I've been here for five months. I've inherited a broken city with broken systems and we can either put a bandaid on top of these broken systems, or you can go to the core and fix them. I'm going to the core to fix them, so no matter who's the mayor, we're going to fix the dysfunctionality of this city. That's the focus.

[Applause]

Mayor Adams: And there's no rush to doing this. We got to get it right.

Question: Yeah, Mr. Mayor, you've spoken a lot and so have the other speakers here about what a state of crisis public housing [inaudible] is in. On the campaign for the last year you promised [inaudible] that's \$4 billion annually in a housing budget of developing and maintaining local Housing. [inaudible] your executive budget only sets aside 2.5 billion. Given the state of crisis housing is in, why did you not make it [inaudible]?

Mayor Adams: Well, first of all, we put in \$5 billion in a 10 year program, which make it a total of \$22 billion, more than we've ever invested. We need to acknowledge that. We've invested more in housing totality than any other mayor. We're up to \$22 billion. We're going to continue to invest in NYCHA. We had a strong feeling that we were going to get the 30 plus billion dollars from Washington D.C., based on what we were seeing. We're going to continue to analyze and manage this budget that we have. We understand how difficult a budget cycle that we're in, and we're going to invest in NYCHA continuously, but we need help from Albany. We need help in Washington D.C.. And we are going to use our dollars here to continue to invest in NYCHA.

Question: Yeah I know, but you're saying that figure-

Mayor Adams: Yes, I am.

Question: Okay-

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