

**TESTIMONY FROM NYCHA EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT FOR OPERATIONS CARLOS
LABOY-DIAZ
SANITATION AND RECYCLING PRACTICES AT NYCHA DEVELOPMENTS
COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC HOUSING WITH THE COMMITTEE ON SANITATION AND SOLID
WASTE MANAGEMENT
THURSDAY, MAY 23, 2013 – 1:00 PM
16TH FLOOR COMMITTEE ROOM, 250 BROADWAY, NEW YORK, NY**

Chairwoman Rosie Mendez and Chairwoman Letitia James, members of the Committees on Public Housing and Sanitation and Solid Waste Management, and other distinguished members of the City Council, good afternoon. Thank you for the opportunity to discuss with you the New York City Housing Authority's (NYCHA) recycling practices, which are part of our commitment to identify and implement the most innovative and cost-efficient solutions to help reduce NYCHA's environmental impact and financial deficit. I am Carlos G. Laboy-Diaz, Executive Vice President for Operations.

Leading the Way Forward

Since 2007, NYCHA has undertaken a number of ambitious efforts as part of our Green Agenda to build a progressive and more sustainable future for our residents and the city. That year, Mayor Bloomberg tasked Board Member Margarita López with spearheading environmental initiatives at NYCHA as the Authority's Environmental Coordinator. NYCHA's total energy costs typically exceed \$500 million each year, and our measures to significantly lower energy consumption will reduce our carbon footprint, enhance staff efficiency, and improve the quality of life for public housing families. Home to over 400,000 New Yorkers – or five percent of the City's population – NYCHA is a critical partner in fulfilling the Mayor's PlaNYC, a bold, innovative, and long-term strategy to position New York City as a worldwide model of sustainability in the 21st century.

I'm proud to say that we have reduced total carbon emissions by about 140,000 tons from 2005 to 2010, the equivalent of taking over 29,000 cars off the road.

However, while our energy consumption has decreased, energy prices – which are clearly beyond NYCHA’s control – have increased, raising our energy expenditures overall. In fact, our costs nearly doubled from 2002 to 2012, going from \$268 million to over \$530 million. Imagine what they would be if we had not implemented energy saving measures.

Green Accomplishments

NYCHA is indeed a model for public housing agencies across the nation, with green achievements ranging from resident education to significant upgrades to our infrastructure. Our recycling effort – an evolving and incremental program that requires partnership, participation, and tough choices to succeed – is but one piece of NYCHA’s larger Green Agenda. I would like to begin this afternoon by sharing with you some of our most notable initiatives in this arena.

Over the past several years, NYCHA has proactively engaged multiple partners from the public, nonprofit, and private sectors to make our efforts successful. For example, with the New York City Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) we installed a blue roof, permeable pavement, and other improvements to reduce runoff at Bronx River Houses. DEP is also investing in similar projects at Seth Low, Hope Gardens, and Edenwald Houses. Our partnership with the City and the Clinton Climate Initiative has enabled us to purchase energy efficient technologies at reduced prices. Our work with AmeriCorps’ Green City Force program has trained about 100 NYCHA youth for green collar jobs, providing a stipend and educational award. Con Ed’s expertise and resources such as energy efficient showerheads and surge protectors help us lower consumption, resulting in decreased utility costs, a more reliable electrical system, and real benefits for NYCHA families; together, we have installed over 200,000 compact fluorescent light bulbs (CFL) that are reducing greenhouse gases by about 8,000 tons per year. With the support of our residents and partners such as the New York Restoration Project, we have planted over 12,000 trees citywide.

Together with the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH), we have been tackling a number of rodent issues. DOHMH has provided NYCHA with recommendations and guidance on eradicating the rodent population at several developments, and our participation in the Mayor's Interagency Rodent Task Force will also help to improve sanitation and recycling efforts.

NYCHA leveraged American Recovery and Reinvestment Act and City funding to install a highly efficient geothermal system for heating water at 344 East 28th Street, one of our Manhattan developments. Over the past several years, we have installed more than 795 energy efficient instantaneous hot water heaters in over 81 developments, reducing natural gas consumption by over 3.4 million therms, which is equivalent to 17,000 metric tons of carbon dioxide or over 3,500 cars. And NYCHA's Computerized Heating Automated System (CHAS) allows us to optimize heating facilities, contain energy costs, and curtail carbon emissions. NYCHA is proud to be the first public housing authority ever to win the Energy Project of the Year award from the Association of Energy Engineers, for energy efficient lighting and boiler upgrades at Castle Hill Houses that reduced natural gas consumption by nearly 800,000 therms in three years, equivalent to 4,000 metric tons of carbon dioxide or more than 800 cars.

Resident engagement and education have been central to our efforts to lead the way in sustainability. NYCHA's 20 Resident Green Committees – with resident members from developments citywide such as Baruch, Smith, Whitman-Ingersoll, Ravenswood, and Woodside Houses – contribute to and further our initiatives by planning projects, organizing events, and educating neighbors about environmental and energy issues, with assistance from the Mayor's NYC Service Civic Corps volunteers. To engage and support residents, NYCHA developed a variety of tools such as the GreenNYCHA.org website, a social media platform, and the Green Guide, which illustrates various ways to achieve an eco-friendly lifestyle. In addition to providing information on energy and water conservation, we have also focused on the benefits of recycling. Just as resident

engagement is responsible for the success of many of the initiatives I have described, so too will be the case for recycling.

Background on Recycling

As you have heard, our commitment to the Mayor's PlaNYC and sustainability is a critical priority at NYCHA. However, we acknowledge that recycling has always been a challenge for the Authority – as it has been for any landlord of multi-family dwellings – especially considering our scope of 400,000 residents in 2,600 buildings across 334 developments. When New York City's recycling law was enacted in 1989, NYCHA instituted protocols and invested in infrastructure at some developments. For instance, NYCHA distributed containers, developed signage, and disseminated educational literature provided by the Department of Sanitation at a number of developments. As the City's recycling program expanded throughout the 1990s and new recyclable materials were added citywide, NYCHA worked with Department of Sanitation personnel to survey the recycling needs of our developments and identify any specific problems. During this period, the Department of Sanitation added recycling truck routes and purchased new collection trucks to accommodate NYCHA's needs.

The Challenges

Despite our efforts over the years to install bins and post signage and decals at various developments, it became evident that we faced many challenges. Primary among those we have identified is the cost of sufficient infrastructure. As we have shared with the City Council, severe funding shortfalls and a deficit require us to constantly make tough choices about leveraging our limited resources. As the city's largest landlord, we must use our scarce funds wisely to first meet our basic obligations such as the safety and security of our families, maintenance and repair, and the integrity of our buildings. It costs NYCHA over \$60 million each year to remove the 445 tons of trash generated per day, requiring more than

2,300 caretakers, and these figures do not include the extra personnel needed on weekends and holidays.

Another obstacle is NYCHA's aging infrastructure – our buildings were not designed with recycling in mind. For instance, trash chutes do not promote the sorting of recyclables from trash. The variety of development configurations precludes a “one-size-fits-all” solution. And identifying space to securely store recyclables for Sanitation's weekly pickup is costly and challenging. Yet we maintain a good working relationship with the Department of Sanitation; our exterior trash compactors and our staff efforts make waste collection easier and more efficient.

NYCHA's concentrated efforts have yielded success in some developments. At Smith Houses, for example, a “be proud of where you live” campaign helped make recycling a part of the development's culture. The Property Manager, in collaboration with the NYCHA Recycling Team and the Resident Association, introduced recycling practices at the development, conducting staff training and resident education workshops; they worked with the Department of Sanitation to ensure timely pickups and the distribution of updated signage. The Property Manager reported an increase in recycling rates; teamwork and consistent involvement by all stakeholders was the key to success here.

Our Path to the Future: Redeveloping the Recycling Program

NYCHA believes recycling is important, and is committed to creating a holistic, strategic approach to it that will be developed in stages. That is why my department formed a Recycling Team to reorganize the existing recycling program and create a recycling model that will institute uniform policies, procedures, and practices. As part of the process, the Recycling Team reviewed all of NYCHA's policies and procedures and worked closely with several developments to address their recycling challenges and improve the processes of collection, storage, and pickup. Regular reporting was established at select

developments to monitor the progress of recycling activities, and the Team has been working actively to develop an effective recycling program.

NYCHA knows that residents and staff must be engaged in order to achieve our shared goals. To that end, the Recycling Team held four recycling sessions in January 2013 with staff from 30 developments citywide that have recycling bins throughout their campuses. Representatives from all levels of the organization participated, including deputy directors, borough administrators, property managers, and caretakers. The groups discussed prior recycling efforts and the challenges presented by them, as well as ideas and recommendations for a sustainable recycling program.

Three similar sessions were held with residents in February 2013. Residents from 24 developments across all five boroughs – including Smith, Vladeck, Mott Haven, and Pomonok Houses – participated. Many of these residents represented groups such as Resident Associations, Resident Green Committees, Resident Watch, and the Garden and Greening Program. We held a third forum with members of Green City Force to get the input of younger residents.

Staff discussions centered on the size, design, and placement of recycling bins, as well as the area and manner in which the recyclables should be stored pending collection. Staff also discussed strategies to engage residents and enhance communication with the Department of Sanitation. The resident groups discussed the improper disposal of trash in the recycling bins, the need for conspicuous posting of recycling signage and literature, and effective strategies to increase resident compliance with recycling mandates. Residents also offered suggestions for the design and placement of recycling bins, the storage of recyclables on development grounds, and how to enhance communication with the Department of Sanitation. For example, residents shared that fixed metal bins should be installed throughout development grounds and roll-out plastic bins should be placed at smaller satellite sites, both of which should be identified clearly with decals and serviced frequently by staff.

The information gleaned from these instructive forums has greatly assisted the Recycling Team in developing key recommendations for the reorganization of the recycling program. Chief among the Team's recommendations are that:

- A volunteer Resident Recycling Ambassador should be in every building to encourage resident participation;
- Three types of clearly labeled and frequently serviced bins should be used – fixed metal, roll-out plastic, and two- and three-stream bins with hopper insertion doors – depending on a development's size, configuration, and infrastructure;
- Fixed bins should be placed near, but not immediately within, building entrances, and within CCTV surveillance areas, if applicable. Bins for buildings without chutes should be placed in the waste disposal areas;
- A specific day and location should be set for bulk and e-waste disposal; and
- Due to once-weekly pickup by the Sanitation Department, recyclables should be stored securely in a designated area within the development, using a padlocked storage unit suitable for the configuration of the grounds and amount collected.

NYCHA's next steps are to pilot these initiatives at certain sites. Once we've evaluated their success and incorporated lessons learned, we will roll out the recycling program in stages for an effective implementation. The Recycling Team is currently working closely with NYCHA's new Director of Resident Engagement to develop effective outreach strategies and educational campaigns. I will be happy to report our progress to the City Council at a later date.

Conclusion

As I stated earlier, our plan is driven by a commitment to the benefits and necessity of recycling, and is based on a thorough assessment of past efforts and the input of those who know the needs best – residents and staff. NYCHA recognizes that the most critical component of a successful recycling program is the involvement of residents; we discovered that for our developments with containers, the mere availability of bins and signage was not enough to ensure a successful program. For that reason, we must implement a systemic, ongoing resident engagement model. In order to successfully engage our residents, we need to invest substantial personnel and financial resources for the provision of education, outreach, workshops, and other key measures that will foster a culture of recycling within our developments. However, due to today’s challenging economy and our fiscal situation, these resources are not currently fully available to us.

NYCHA is completely committed to providing safe, affordable housing for our families in the most cost-effective and environmentally conscious way possible. Yet our efforts to reduce the Authority’s carbon footprint, lower energy and utility consumption, conserve resources, engage residents in adopting low-carbon lifestyles, and preserve public housing for future generations will only be realized with the partnership of our families and other key stakeholders, such as our supporters in the public and private sectors. We will continue working with the Department of Sanitation to develop a sustainable recycling program and increase recycling participation in all of our developments; together we will place recycling containers on the streets around our developments, and NYCHA will look to Sanitation’s partnership with Sustainable South Bronx as a possible model for our sanitation efforts. In conclusion, we ask that our partners in the City Council – equally as invested in a green, healthy New York – assist us in obtaining the funds and resources necessary to fully execute our recycling plan. Thank you, and I’m happy to answer any questions you may have.