

**STATEMENT FOR NYCHA CHAIRMAN JOHN B. RHEA**

**BEFORE THE CITY PLANNING COMMISSION  
REGARDING WEST 129<sup>TH</sup> STREET**

**WEDNESDAY, MARCH 2, 2011 – 10:00 AM**

**22 READE STREET, NEW YORK, NY 10007**

Chair Burden and Members of the Commission, thank you for the opportunity to present the New York City Housing Authority's (NYCHA) project with Harlem Children's Zone to build a new charter school within St. Nicholas Houses, and the rebuilding of West 129<sup>th</sup> Street. I am NYCHA's Chairman, John B. Rhea.

Undertaken in partnership with Harlem Children's Zone, residents of St. Nicholas, the Department of City Planning, and the Department of Transportation, NYCHA believes the charter school project will transform the St. Nicholas Houses, providing educational and economic opportunities for both public housing residents and their neighbors.

NYCHA's Vision and the Revitalization of St. Nicholas Houses

NYCHA has embarked on a long term initiative to evaluate and pursue potential development opportunities on existing NYCHA property. We pursue new construction where it is determined to bring benefits to NYCHA, its residents and our prospective partners. Past infill opportunities have included housing, schools, and commercial space—all of which fronted existing mapped streets.

When we heard that our partner the Harlem Children’s Zone (HCZ) was seeking a site for a new Promise Academy, we believed that St. Nicholas houses could be the perfect location. There are more than 30 schools located on NYCHA campuses throughout the City. NYCHA residents and members of the surrounding community would have a new, first-rate educational facility, as well as access to new programs for adults and children—right on the St. Nicholas campus. Additionally, the move would free up much needed Department of Education space in Harlem.

NYCHA worked extensively with City Planning staff to evaluate the St. Nicholas development and HCZ’s space needs and to ensure no residential buildings would be demolished and no residents would be relocated. Together we determined the best location for the new charter school would be a portion of the central open space—knowing that it would require the rebuilding of West 129<sup>th</sup> street. The street will provide needed access to the school, improve security through more “eyes-on-the-street,” better define public and private space, and improve integration with the surrounding community.

The revitalization of St. Nicholas meets the high standards of the Bloomberg Administration for urban planning and development. It also responds to the Obama Administration’s challenge to housing authorities for comprehensive neighborhood development that integrates affordable housing, schools, community and social services, improved infrastructure and transportation. Further, Harlem Children’s Zone is an outstanding partner, having worked with NYCHA to serve our residents for the last four years, including the operation of the St. Nicholas and Lincoln community centers. The

community center at St. Nicholas Houses has been so successful that HCZ is expanding into additional space at Salem United Methodist Church, located on the NYCHA superblock at West 129<sup>th</sup> Street.

One of the unique characteristics of this project is that HCZ has agreed to modify its charter to give first open preference to the children of St. Nicholas. 2010 was the first year that the preference was in place, and 33 St. Nicholas families who applied to Promise Academy have been accepted. That means that one-third of the incoming kindergarten class of 2012 will be St. Nicholas residents.

When complete, the 135,000 square foot complex will host 1,300 students and provide after-school and weekend programs free of charge to the public for both youth and adults. Even if a child does not attend the Promise Academy, they are encouraged to participate in after-school activities, day camp during the summer, and college preparation programs throughout the year. The state-of-the-art facility will provide programming such as cooking and computer classes, GED preparation, sports programs, and dance classes free for youth and adults. The facility will also house a gymnasium and will allow the community to use its facilities for organized events free of charge during non school hours.

### Job Creation

Additionally, this project will create approximately 200 union positions during construction for which NYCHA is working closely with unions to identify out-of-work union members who live in NYCHA developments for these positions.

When open, the school will generate approximately 100 new jobs ranging from teachers to security personnel to kitchens staff. And HCZ has committed to hire locally.

NYCHA's Office of Resident Employment Services is working to identify St. Nicholas residents who are qualified candidates for these jobs and other positions within Harlem Children's Zone. Already, since July, Harlem Children's Zone has hired 14 St. Nicholas residents.

NYCHA and HCZ held a job fair late last year, and over 200 attendees were provided information on the range of jobs this project will create. HCZ expects to make additional offers soon and hold additional job fairs later this year. Beginning last year, Harlem Children's Zone hired 100 St. Nicholas youth for summer jobs—which they will continue each year.

In the past year, NYCHA and Harlem Children's Zone held dozens of meeting with the residents of St. Nicholas houses that covered specific aspects of this project including Educational Opportunities, Street Design, Construction Mitigation, Safety and Security and Jobs. We have incorporated residents' feedback to improve the plan.

### Conclusion

By transforming the St. Nicholas campus through the addition of a state-of-the-art school and reconstruction of West 129<sup>th</sup> Street, we believe this project will bring significant economic and social benefits to St. Nicholas families and the surrounding community.

Today you will hear from AKRF, our civil engineers and Katherine Gray, Deputy Director of NYCHA's Department for Development, who will present the mapping action and placement of the street on the St. Nicholas superblock for you to better understand the exciting changes.