

# DAILY NEWS

NEW YORK'S HOMETOWN NEWSPAPER

## Broken NYCHA can be repaired

**T**he New York City Housing Authority is the custodian of a vast and critical public resource — 180,000 apartments, hundreds of developments, thousands of workers — that lives and dies silently.

Every broken lock, leaking pipe, deteriorated roof, uninstalled camera generates a chain reaction of other problems. The most serious of these is the build up of hazardous mold that chokes the breath out of the young and old alike and the lack of security that makes entering many lobbies and riding many elevators a life-threatening experience.

Our organizations in Manhattan, the South Bronx and East Brooklyn have worked in NYCHA developments for two decades. East Brooklyn Congregations, South Bronx Churches, Manhattan Together and EQUAL in Queens are all part of Metro IAF and are made up of churches, synagogues, mosques, tenant and homeowner groups, housing organizations and schools.

Most of our NYCHA work has been nitty-gritty and out of the public eye — meeting with tenants, documenting serious repair and security concerns, creating portfolios of photographs and letters to NYCHA, meeting with project and borough managers, and then monitoring the response. Or lack of response.

### BE OUR GUEST

BY MARIELYS DIVANNE  
and THE REV. DAVID HABERER

As one example, NYCHA now lacks the capacity to spend nearly \$1 billion in available funds for major capital repairs, as the Daily News has reported. We in Metro IAF first learned of this, not from enemies of the mayor, but from several of his current and former top-level appointees who were tearing their hair out in frustration.

It's the lack of response, up and down the line at NYCHA, that led to a series of futile meetings with the current chairman, John Rhea, and his top staff and a very sober set of meetings at City Hall with then-deputy mayor Dennis Walcott.

We didn't meet to whine or complain. We met to sound the alarm and to offer solutions based on decades of experience in the city. We said that NYCHA was in a state of decline, that the pace of decline was accelerating and that there were ways to reverse it.

Now, NYCHA has been in The News — literally. The kind of investigative reporting and editorial writing that reminds New Yorkers of why newspapers are essential to the health of a great city has exposed what many of us have known for years.

The temptation is to throw up one's hands and say that NYCHA is too big, that its developments are too far gone, that the

agency is too badly run to revive and that a rescue would cost too much money.

Those are exactly the kinds of things people used to say about the thousands of acres of abandoned land and scores of thousands of abandoned buildings in the 1980s, about the homicide rate in the 1990s, and about the sorry state of our schools as recently as 2000. And, yet, in true New York fashion, with great difficulty, much disagreement and voices raised, all of these once-inevitable and intractable declines have been tackled, halted and reversed.

Now it's NYCHA's turn. But, as with these other efforts, new thinking, new structures and new leadership are all needed.

The new thinking goes this way: NYCHA is the last great public housing system in the nation, accounting for 15% of the remaining stock. Its waiting list is 200,000 families long. It can and should be preserved and improved as a message to all that the word "public" doesn't imply "failure" and as a message to working poor and poor New Yorkers that the city can still be home to them.

The new structure would involve the creation of an entity like the School Construction Authority (or the use of SCA) to take over and professionally organize and man-

age all of the repair and construction aspects of NYCHA. The new leadership would involve hiring a person with established bona fides in housing. New York is fortunate to be the home of some of the world's finest housing professionals, including former city commissioners who have the respect of many.

The mayor's defense of the current NYCHA chairman is to accuse his critics of character assassination. This pattern is cynical and unseemly. The mayor should admit, as he did with former Schools Chancellor Cathie Black, that he made a mistake by putting a person with impressive financial credentials in a position that required extensive executive experience and deeper operational know-how.

The mayor has a clock in City Hall reminding everyone how many days remain in his third term. He should use them all to revive NYCHA.

We in Metro IAF stand ready to work with him, day and night, to bring decent, safe, healthy housing to NYCHA's 400,000 important residents.

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**The mayor should admit that he made a mistake.**