



Time To Act: Restoring the Promise of NYC's Public Housing

We have been aware of the rapid deterioration of the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) for years, through multiple federal, state, and city administrations. Yet we have continued to take only half-steps to turn this situation around. As a result, conditions in New York City's public housing now range from the unacceptable to the deplorable.

While the scale of the problem — \$45 billion needed in capital repairs¹ — makes solving it an intimidating undertaking, an incremental approach only adds more to the ultimate cost, regardless of whether or not we solve the problem. Deferring needed renovations adds more than \$850 million a year to the ultimate repair bill.² In addition, we are at a critical juncture regarding the overall viability of the buildings themselves.

If we do not act now, we will find ourselves quickly facing a massive situation of demolition by neglect.

If we allow NYCHA to enter an era of managing this demolition by neglect, we will rapidly lose our most affordable housing in a city marked by an ongoing affordable housing emergency. This will mean much more than just the loss of buildings; it will mean enormous emergency shelter expenses, an economy damaged by a loss of workforce, irrevocably scarred neighborhoods, and massive displacement of thousands of longtime New Yorkers. And it will mean that we as a city have failed our citizens in a truly shameful way. A great city does not allow people's homes to fall apart.

Now is the time to develop and implement a complete and real commitment to bringing our public housing back to a state of good repair. To do this, we will need three things: a serious and rapid influx of funding; more innovative and efficient structures for management and capital delivery; and a confluence of major political and civic will. These need to build on, not replace, current efforts already underway.

The main priority now needs to be implementing existing plans, including PACT to Preserve and Build to Preserve, and scaling up the speed at which they can be realized.

RPA is also proposing 10 actions that we believe will be major steps in this process, and can work in conjunction with other approaches to form a comprehensive and long-term solution. These recommendations will not solve the problem by themselves, but they will be large and meaningful pieces of the puzzle.

NYCHA's immediate maintenance costs have increased 15-fold since 2011.

2011 projected costs for immediate maintenance:

\$1.6 Billion

2017 projected costs for immediate maintenance:

\$25.4 Billion

¹ How much in repairs is needed at NYCHA is dependent on the time horizon used. \$45 billion is the amount of total repairs needed over a 20 year period. \$32 billion in repairs is needed over the next 5 years. For a detailed description of NYCHA's capital needs, see "Physical Assessment: Final Report," prepared for NYCHA by STV AECOM, 2017.

² See "Physical Assessment: Final Report," prepared for NYCHA by STV AECOM, 2017.



10 ACTIONS TO REPAIR NYCHA

1. Form a New Civic Coalition for NYCHA

We all benefit from public housing and the opportunities it brings, and more entities need to advocate for public housing residents. Employers, labor unions, faith institutions, businesses, professional associations, banks, and credit unions should be part of the solution and commit to providing concrete resources toward the effort to save our public housing.

2. Make NYCHA the Centerpiece of New York City's Housing Plan

Virtually no NYCHA-owned development is in or even near a state of good repair. Fortunately, the City, through the Housing Preservation and Development (HPD) and Housing Development Corporation (HDC), has the resources and professional staff dedicated to facilitating just the sort of comprehensive affordable housing preservation NYCHA needs. NYCHA should not be siloed from these resources.

3. Create a Separate Public Development Entity for NYCHA

NYCHA must not only be able to raise money quickly, it must be able to spend money quickly and efficiently. Part of this must involve a new entity which is not constrained by the unnecessary procurement rules and regulations that are part of NYCHA. The entity should be chaired by the Commissioner of HPD, and consideration should be given for this entity to be housed within HDC.

4. Invest in the Next Generation of Public Housing

NYC benefits from public housing and the opportunities it brings when this housing is kept in habitable shape, but we have not had a serious conversation about expanding it. By building new public housing, residents could be relocated from existing buildings, the older buildings replaced or renovated, and entire campuses redeveloped in ways that prevent displacement.

5. Generate New Revenue in the Long-Term by Supplementing the Existing Transfer to Preserve Program with New Options

NYCHA's untapped development rights are a critical component for generating needed funds for the immediate benefit of residents. The existing Transfer to Preserve program, which involves selling NYCHA's Transferable Development rights (TDRs), can be updated to allow more flexibility.

6. Have High-End Real Estate Contribute its Fair Share to NYCHA

The desirability of NYC has driven the value of real estate up, especially high-end real estate. Through mechanisms such as co-op/condo abatement and a pied-a-terre tax, we can use increasing value in order to help maintain the housing which allows us to have this diverse and desirable city.

7. Return to Development-Based Operations

Residents and other stakeholders have continuously stressed the importance of more localized property management. By creating smaller management entities, NYCHA can be more responsive in addressing maintenance concerns and have the opportunity to test different management styles and strategies.

8. Create a Skills-Based Exchange Program for Property Managers

To help bring NYCHA back into the City, we should develop professional exchange opportunities for staff, where property managers, superintendents, and other employees from NYCHA are placed in similar positions in private and non-profit managed buildings for a period of time, and vice versa.

9. Continue to Expand the Role of City Government in NYCHA Operations

Utilizing other City staffing and municipal infrastructure already in place when it comes to NYCHA will continue to be an important means of retaining and improving services while working within a constrained budget.

10. Bring Independent Voices to the Board of Directors

It is vitally important that the Mayor continue to control and be accountable for NYCHA. However, the creation of a supervisory Board made up of Mayoral appointees, a resident representative, and appointees from other elected officials would enable better oversight going forward and help us avoid making the mistakes of the past.



This factsheet summarizes a 2019 Regional Plan Association Report. Read the full report at rpa.org.