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## COMMUNITY BOARD ELEVEN

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### **Housing Committee Tuesday, February 3, 2015, 6:00 p.m. Board Office**

*Mission: The Housing Committee seeks to review, monitor, initiate and/or report on the implementation of all current and new housing initiatives and homeownership programs, and to advocate for the preservation of quality affordable housing for all East Harlem residents.*

\*\*\* Minutes \*\*\*

Present: Adem Brija, Myra Colon, John Green, Wendy Hewlett, Alvin Johnson, Keith Massey, Nilsa Orama, William Smith,

Excused: George Gallego, Maria Nieves, Eudora Ortiz, Candy Vives-Vasquez

Absent: Andre Vital

Guests: Louis Bailey, WeACT; Sherice Williams, MNS; Jennifer Hadlock, CVH; Joel Gil, Picture the Homeless; Anne Kadamani, El Barrio Unite; Evelyn Collazo, El Barrio Unite; Sandra Gadsden; Craig Huhes; Rosa Custodio, Jeffersonville HDFC; Edwin Pabon, Jeffersonville HDFC; Theresa Richardson; Jaime Estades, Latino Leadership Institute; Gabriel Hernandez, AM Rodriguez' office; Jason Cruz, AM Rodriguez' office

#### 1. Report on Street Homelessness in East Harlem

- a. Committee met with Erica Strang from Community Center for Urban Community Services and Kerzena Dozier, Director of Communications from Deblasio's office. Ms. Strang explained to the committee the rising homeless issue within our community. She explained that her organization makes every effort in trying to help street homeless people find permanent housing. As city homeless shelters expand, more issues of unsafe conditions within the shelter system have arisen. Ms. Strang stated that part of the rapid increase in the homeless population is due to the economics of today and lack of affordable housing. Her organization targets the chronically homeless and if that is not the case one will be referred to another organization for assistance. She explained that there are folks who are not necessarily living on the streets but who are living from one place to next or suffer from mental illness with no assistance.

Ms. Hewlett mentioned the issue of landlords being apprehensive about housing the homeless. The question was raised about the transitioning and education of one on how to maintain an apartment. Erica explained that although the goal is

permanent housing her organization works hand in hand with social service organization so that long term case management is used to assist newly renters with the necessary resources to prevent one from being homeless again. The mayor's initiative "LINC voucher" was briefly explained. We must remember that just because one is homeless doesn't necessarily mean they are unemployed. The city economically benefits when a homeless person finds housing is far greater than having someone live on the streets. ER visits, detox, hospitalization and possible incarceration are all expenses that we pay to prevent someone from living on the streets. One finds that by getting a person who is dealing with any one of these issues into permanent housing you are saving the city a ton of money. There was also the issue of lack of senior housing, the way that HPD conducts the lotteries and how one is disqualified based on the information provided on the application and the growth of the drug K2 that is similar to PCP and how cheap it is to get. Some hot spots in our area are 126th in Park, 125th Lexington, anywhere along the Harlem River, the *Crack is Wack* park, 126th FDR (salt pile) and 128th between Park and Madison Avenue there is a school there with an overhang and used by the homeless as shelter. Erica's team works along with 311. If you happen to see a homeless person in a distressed area one should call 311. This report will be sent to Erica's team and they will go out find the individual and assist. Legal assistance by Legal Aid, CUCS is available to the homeless. If a homeless person was issued a summons a member Erica's team will show up with the person for support as well as to speak on their behalf. It is important to remember that Department of Homeless Services organizes a reach out event that Erica's organization along with community members go out at 5:30 am in search of homeless people. The purpose of this is bringing in the homeless to a safer environment.

- b. Ms. Dozier, Director of Community Relations in the Commissioner's office of the NYC Department of Homeless Services, explained what the current outreach initiatives are for this administration's role within the prevention of Homelessness in NYC. There are currently 58,000 families in the shelter system. There are currently 42,000 children within the shelter system. 95% of people that utilizes the Homebase services are able to stay in their apartment. Homebase is the one-stop shop for people and families to assist in preventing homelessness. The program which is front center is Homebase. There are 23 Homebase centers and funding has increased to 42 million dollars. Homebase is a one stop shop to prevent eviction, family mediation, job assistance and medical assistance.

Permanent affordable housing Living in Communities (LINC voucher program 1-5) is a rental assistance program geared towards helping families to remain in their homes.

LINC 1- is for people who are working 34 hours a week that don't make enough money to afford housing within the city. For example if your rent is 1200 under the program LINC voucher which last for 5 years will pay 6-8% of rent leaving the tenant to pay 32%.

LINC 2- is for people, families that have been in the shelter system before. This is also a 5 year assistance but one would not only receive the rental assistance but will be assigned a case manager/after care. This service will allow one to monitor/ work with the tenant to prevent eviction.

LINC 3- is for victims of domestic violence

LINC 4- is for seniors over the age of 60 years old

LINC 5- is a pilot program for working single adults.

It was expressed to the committee that finding units to house voucher holders is somewhat difficult. Incentives like 1,000 dollars per lease signing and 15% of 1 year rent up front. The mayor's office is currently working with NYCHA to prioritize housing for voucher holders. Last year, 1,000 families were placed in NYCHA. For this year and next year another 750 families will be housed, 500 families received Section 8 vouchers through HPD. There is no real listing that shows available units. Landlords are not jumping at the idea of a new voucher or accepted someone on it. It was expressed to the mayors rep that threw the Work Advantage voucher landlords took a hard hit. New York City is a right to shelter city, which means everyone is entitled to shelter.

There is a list of brokers that currently serve as a resource to any one that has a voucher. It was mentioned that there should be some sort of "tax credit" benefit in place attached to the structure of the voucher. Once you receive the voucher the clock starts to tick, it is not helpful if a person has a voucher and is unable to find adequate housing.

The failure of the work advantage voucher changed the credibility of DHS. The trust level for DHS is slim to none. What recourse does the landlord have if a family from the shelter is housed and is then evicted. Landlords spend a great deal of money to operate these buildings. The committee and community members spoke of the issue of the "revolving door" theory. Five years is really not a long enough time plus what happens after the five years. Who and how are the families being monitored.

c. Committee discussion on 2014 goals and 2013 accomplishments

2. Adjournment

**Adem Brija made a motion to adjourn which was seconded by Nilsa Orama and passed unanimously. The meeting was adjourned at 8:25pm.**