

A City Within A City

An Interview with Lisa Bova-Hiatt, Chief Executive Officer, New York City Housing Authority

EDITORS' NOTE Lisa Bova-Hiatt was appointed Chief Executive Officer of the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) in July 2023 after serving as Interim Chief Executive Officer since September 2022. Bova-Hiatt has more than 25 years of experience in the public sector. She joined NYCHA in February 2020 as general counsel, where she led the Authority's Law Department and was involved with all NYCHA executive matters, including compliance with



Lisa Bova-Hiatt

the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development agreement, NYCHA's transformation and implementation plans, and operations and administration. She was previously general counsel of the City University Construction Fund and executive university counsel of the City University of New York (CUNY). Prior to CUNY, Bova-Hiatt served as executive director of the New York Governor's Office of Storm Recovery, where she played an integral role in helping the agency carry out the reconstruction of over 12,000 homes and hundreds of infrastructure projects. Bova-Hiatt previously spent 19 years in various roles at the New York City Law Department, including as the deputy chief of the Tax and Bankruptcy Litigation Division, where she specialized in real estate acquisition and development, and an advisor to administration officials. She is a graduate of Villanova University and Brooklyn Law School.

INSTITUTION BRIEF The New York City Housing Authority, the largest public housing authority in North America, was created in 1934 to provide decent, affordable housing for low- and moderate-income New Yorkers. NYCHA (nyc.gov/site/nycha) is home to 1 in 17 New Yorkers, providing affordable housing to 520,808 authorized residents through public housing and Permanent Affordability Commitment Together (PACT) programs as well as Section 8 housing. NYCHA serves 341,681 residents in 177,565 apartments across 335 conventional public housing and PACT developments. There are 152,049 apartments within 242 conventional public housing program (Section 9) developments, and 25,516 apartments within 93 PACT developments.

How do you describe New York City Housing Authority's mission?

NYCHA's mission is to provide decent, affordable housing for low- and moderate-income New Yorkers. Today, that means prioritizing the key pillar areas of the 2019 HUD Agreement – lead, mold, heat, elevators, pests, and waste, and apartment and building inspections. It also means using every available tool to both invest in our properties in the face of decades of federal disinvestment and mounting physical needs, and developing creative reinvestment strategies to reimagine what NYCHA campuses can look like in their communities.

What interested you in leading NYCHA and made you feel it was the right fit?

I am a lifelong New Yorker and have spent my entire career in public service, having previously worked at the City University of New York, the Governor's Office of Storm Recovery, and the New York City Law Department. When the opportunity presented itself to join the Housing Authority, I was excited to take on the challenge, and bring my experience and

knowledge to the Authority at a pivotal moment of transformation. We often refer to NYCHA as "a city within a city," because one in 17 New Yorkers calls NYCHA home. The opportunity to make an impact in the lives of so many New Yorkers is what drives me every day.

Will you highlight New York City Housing Authority's history and how the organization has evolved?

The New York City Housing Authority, the largest public housing authority in North America, was created in 1934, and the first NYCHA development, First Houses, opened in 1935. NYCHA provides affordable housing to 520,808 authorized residents through public housing and our Permanent Affordability Commitment Together (PACT) programs as well as Section 8 housing. NYCHA has 177,569 apartments in 2,411 buildings across 335 conventional public housing and PACT developments.

Today, I'm proud to say that NYCHA has made transformative changes over the last six years. Since the signing of the HUD Agreement in 2019, we have worked with rigorous oversight and robust transparency to establish our Transformation Plan, leading to tangible



NYCHA's LaGuardia Houses on the Lower East Side of Manhattan

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improvements inside the homes and buildings of NYCHA residents through progress made in the HUD Agreement pillar areas, fundamental changes to management structure, and the adoption of best practices across the board. This is work we continue to focus on every day.

How does NYCHA connect residents to critical programs and services with a focus on economic opportunity, youth, seniors, and social services?

NYCHA's Resident Services, Partnerships, and Initiatives Department (RSPI) engages and connects NYCHA residents to a variety of critical programs and services. RSPI also leads and supports a wide array of partnerships, programs, and initiatives in the areas of economic opportunity, youth, health, seniors, and social services. Our Business Pathways programs, for instance, harness the entrepreneurial spirit inherent in so many NYCHA residents and provides them with the tools necessary to start and grow their own businesses in the food and childcare industries.

What role do you see for public-private partnerships in addressing NYCHA's needs?

NYCHA's Permanent Affordability Commitment Together (PACT) program depends

on partnerships with private and nonprofit development partners who are selected based on resident input. The PACT program converts developments to a more stable, federally funded program called Project-Based Section 8, unlocking funding to complete comprehensive repairs, while also ensuring homes remain permanently affordable and residents have the same basic rights as they possess in the public housing program. Once the property is converted to Project-Based Section 8, NYCHA leases the land and buildings to the development partners who conduct comprehensive renovations, serve as the new on-site property manager, and provide enhanced social services and community programs.

To date, 146 NYCHA developments, or over 39,000 apartments, have entered the PACT program and are in pre-development, under construction, or have completed construction, representing over \$13 billion in capital repairs for the Authority.

Will you discuss NYCHA's efforts to build trust with residents in communities that have historically felt neglected?

NYCHA has placed a great deal of emphasis on resident outreach and engagement in recent

years. One example would be the PACT program, where NYCHA engages with residents for years ahead of a development's conversion, including by working in close concert with residents to select partner teams and develop community plan documents that guide the project's priorities. Another great example is the Trust votes at NYCHA developments, which give residents a say in the future of their homes. Following 100 days of engagement at each voting site, the development's residents are given the opportunity to vote to join the Public Housing Preservation Trust or PACT program and unlock comprehensive renovations, or to remain a part of the Section 9 portfolio, effectively deciding the future of their homes.

How important has it been to build the NYCHA team?

The 2019 HUD Agreement compelled NYCHA to enact its Transformation Plan, which made fundamental changes to its management structure and established best practices across the board, with emphasis on key areas that directly affect residents' quality of life. We have empowered a dynamic and highly competent group of individuals to lead the departments that make up the Authority, and their diligent work in service of the Transformation Plan has been critical to NYCHA's success in recent years. I am very proud to work with such innovative and dedicated leaders.

What do you feel are the keys to effective leadership and how do you approach your management style?

I have always believed that an effective leader should have a clear vision, but remain flexible and adapt to challenges as they arise. I strive to lead by example and interact with all levels of staff, understanding that they may bring different perspectives and valuable insights to the table. We certainly could not do what we do every day without the dedicated staff of the Authority, and I am inspired by the public servants who work alongside me day in and day out.

What are your priorities for NYCHA as you look to the future?

NYCHA's top priority remains enhancing the quality of life of our residents. We will continue our work to enhance day-to-day operations through the Transformation Plan; make marked improvements in the pillar areas; reinvest in our properties using the PACT program and Public Housing Preservation Trust; and build trust with residents by engaging them in key decision-making areas that directly impact their lives. ●



Berry Street Houses development, part of NYCHA's Permanent Affordability Commitment Together (PACT) program