

**TESTIMONY FROM NYCHA PROJECT MANAGER ELENA TENCHIKOVA**  
**RECYCLING IN NYCHA**  
**COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC HOUSING WITH THE COMMITTEE ON SANITATION AND SOLID**  
**WASTE MANAGEMENT**  
**WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 30, 2016 – 1:00 PM**  
**COMMITTEE ROOM, CITY HALL, NEW YORK, NY**

Chairs Ritchie Torres and Antonio Reynoso, members of the Public Housing and Sanitation and Solid Waste Management Committees, and other distinguished members of the City Council: good afternoon. I am Elena Tenchikova, Project Manager in NYCHA's Management Services Department. Joining me today are Kilsys Payamps-Roure, Chief of Staff to the General Manager, and my colleagues from the New York City Department of Sanitation (DSNY): Bridget Anderson, Deputy Commissioner of the Bureau of Recycling and Sustainability, and Chief Steven Costas, Director for the Bureau of Cleaning and Collection.

Thank you for the opportunity to discuss the historic progress NYCHA has made in recycling as part of *NextGeneration NYCHA*, the Authority's 10-year strategic plan. *NextGeneration NYCHA* is guiding the Authority to create safe, clean, and connected communities and transform NYCHA into a more sustainable organization.

Mayor de Blasio made the bold commitment for New York to become the most sustainable big city in the world, through the *OneNYC* plan and its goal to send zero waste to landfills by 2030 via a series of initiatives, including recycling. Through the leadership of Mayor de Blasio, NYCHA Chair Shola Olatoye, and DSNY Commissioner Kathryn Garcia, and the strong partnership with collaborators, which includes both Chair Torres and Chair Reynoso, this administration is doing something no other administration has been able to accomplish in nearly three decades. Our effort differs from past attempts because of the partnerships we formed with government entities, residents, and non-profits such as Green City Force, GrowNYC, and the Robin Hood Foundation. These partnerships give us confidence that we will succeed, as it takes buy-in from the entire community to change culture. And that is what we are doing. By

the end of 2016, we will have made recycling available at public housing for more than 400,000 residents living in nearly 2,600 buildings across the five boroughs.

## **Our Commitment to Recycling**

As the country's largest public housing authority in the nation's largest city, NYCHA has an important part to play in preserving the land we live on, the water we drink, and the air we breathe for this and future generations. As Mayor de Blasio puts our city on a path toward long-term waste reduction and greater sustainability, NYCHA is fostering leaders on environmentally conscious practices like recycling.

The Authority understands that proper waste disposal is a quality of life issue for our residents. For too long, conversations focused on NYCHA's challenges with basic garbage issues – litter, dumping, pests, and improper waste disposal – and recycling got left out of the equation. Under this administration, recycling is an important piece of NYCHA's overall waste management strategy and operational plans, and our work with residents to feel ownership and empowerment to love where they live.

## **Thirty Years in the Making**

NYCHA has made some efforts to recycle since 1989, but it was not a systemic approach. Recycling is a challenge for any landlord of scattered, multi-family dwellings, where you have a concentration of people and minimum space. It was clear to us that overcoming infrastructure challenges specific to our developments and educational outreach was necessary to achieving a successful and comprehensive program at NYCHA. Our buildings – the majority of which were built prior to the 1960s – were not designed with recycling in mind. In many cases, our developments lacked a dedicated space where recyclables can be stored until they are picked up. And a variety of development configurations required more than one infrastructure solution. Also, the Department of Sanitation had to

incorporate NYCHA developments into its existing collection routes. In addition, education of residents and training of staff was needed to make recycling part of the new paradigm. Finally, it was historically difficult to identify and allocate funds to remedy the issues, in a landscape of scarce federal funding for public housing.

## **Our Solutions**

Our improved and more comprehensive approach was tailored to address the obstacles to a successful, system-wide recycling program.

First we looked at the issues. We discussed the challenges with staff and residents, who provided their recommendations. Then we formed a Waste Management Working Group, where NYCHA staff and industry experts discussed how we could implement a safe and effective program, based on the best practices of other landlords. We looked at user-friendly bin design and designated areas for collection that are accessible to staff and residents and that encourage proper waste disposal.

We then conducted an assessment of all our sites to determine the infrastructure needed, such as concrete pads to support bins and instructive decals to facilitate sorting of recyclables. During the site assessments, we also informed residents at the site about the recycling program and, in concert with residents and staff, we identified appropriate locations for bins. Then we installed the necessary infrastructure, including signage, in coordination with DSNY.

Following the infrastructure additions, we launched an extensive outreach campaign to educate residents on what, why, and how to recycle – in partnership with DSNY, we've engaged more than 11,600 residents in all 328 developments at about 350 kick-off meetings and special events, including those geared to youth and seniors. We publicized the recycling program and its protocols in a dedicated

website and in *The NYCHA Journal*, our newspaper for residents. Chair Olatoye and Commissioner Garcia starred in an educational video shown in taxis that highlighted the recycling initiative. We distributed informational materials, such as mailings and flyers in multiple languages, to every NYCHA household. We trained more than 1,400 employees, from front-line staff to borough management, on recycling procedures, in collaboration with DSNY and GrowNYC. Finally, we've been working with DSNY to arrange recycling pick-ups at our developments.

We have spent almost \$3 million of the \$13.5 million allocated over five years for our recycling initiative, installing the necessary infrastructure and educating residents at nearly all of our developments. NYCHA worked with Jamestown Advanced Products, a woman-owned business in upstate New York, to manufacture each 250-pound bin, which was custom-designed with input from staff and residents. By buying local, NYCHA saved on shipping costs and reduced carbon emissions associated with transport, since the other suppliers are based in California and Canada. NYCHA employees performed the site work in-house, laying the concrete pads for each bin, which involves about 3,000 pounds of material. In total, we installed nearly 800 pads and 1,500 bins.

NYCHA's current recycling efforts started at two developments in February 2015, and our program has grown considerably since then. I'm pleased to report that as of October 2016, recycling is active – meaning that DSNY collection routes have also been initiated – at 1,960 buildings. That means that nearly 370,000 residents, 91 percent of our population, currently have access to recycling.

### **Next Steps**

The second phase of the initiative, which is currently underway, is continued outreach and education at every single development to significantly increase resident participation. These educational activities, workshops, and events will be conducted in collaboration with DSNY and GrowNYC, our non-profit partner.

Staff training will also continue; with support from DSNY, staff will be retrained annually on recycling procedures. As we continue to raise awareness about recycling, we will assess whether developments require additional infrastructure. To monitor the effectiveness of the program, we will conduct recycling inspections, communicate regularly with DSNY, and submit periodic reports to the Mayor's Office of Sustainability.

### **Effective Partnerships**

As I mentioned, the partnerships we developed with the City, non-profits, residents, and employees are crucial to our success. Now I'd like to describe some of these efforts.

Resident engagement and education have been a central part of our implementation. Thanks to vital support from partners like Green City Force, GrowNYC, and DSNY, we've encouraged thousands of residents to make recycling a mindset and a daily practice. Residents are collaborating with us to foster the program's success. Fifty Green City Force Energy Corps Members – young NYCHA residents preparing for “green-collar” careers – are promoting recycling at the developments participating in the Mayor's Action Plan for Neighborhood Safety, a collaborative effort to make communities safer and healthier. GrowNYC is training residents to become volunteer Environmental Ambassadors who share their knowledge and enthusiasm for recycling with the community.

Eighty staff in our Resident Engagement Department have been trained on recycling outreach and education, tailored to constituencies like youth, adults, seniors, and resident leaders. They take every opportunity to incorporate instruction on recycling into their daily interactions with residents. As part of a Robin Hood-funded program that trains residents to become caretakers, participants learn about recycling best practices in a day-long training and also

visit a local recycling facility, thanks to support from DSNY; this is an effective opportunity to engage both residents and future NYCHA staff.

### **Inspiring Leaders, Inspiring Success**

Our recycling community events have been well attended, such as the one held at Cooper Park Houses, where elected officials like Speaker Mark-Viverito and Chair Reynoso participated. This outreach is inspiring a new generation of leaders to dedicate themselves to a greener city. Joy Junious, a young resident of Brownsville Houses, is one of NYCHA's Environmental Ambassadors. About her work, she said that: *"My goal is to make [my neighborhood] a better place, make it cleaner and more visually appealing for current and future generations. Recycling and healthy environments go hand in hand, and with proper trash disposal, you see the benefits immediately."*

Another Ambassador, Pamela Azore of Pomonok Houses, said that the blue and green recycling bins at her development are a beautiful sight, and she hopes to become *"really proficient in delivering the message to residents and neighbors that we're going green...they care about the planet and want their children and grandchildren to grow up in a healthy environment."* Both of these amazing Ambassadors are with us today.

The enthusiasm for recycling is evident at Marlboro Houses, where recycling has truly become part of the development's culture, thanks to collaboration between residents and staff. Marlboro was one of the first sites to become active, and DSNY collection reports show consistently good recycling rates. Other successful developments include Baruch and Woodson Houses. NYCHA staff were excited when they heard that we would be discussing our recycling initiative at a City Council hearing; you'll have the opportunity to read the comments that several employees submitted for the public record about their role in the launch.

### **Conclusion**

Recycling is a challenge across our city, but we believe we have developed a program that will be successful at NYCHA and help move the City toward its zero waste goal. To overcome the major obstacles, our comprehensive approach includes resident involvement, staff education, appropriate infrastructure that's based on best practices, and collaboration with DSNY and other partners.

This is a historic initiative: By January 1, every single NYCHA resident will be able to recycle. We are installing innovative infrastructure at every development, and the extent of our resident engagement is unprecedented. We will continue reaching out to residents over the next few years to educate them about the need for recycling and the process. With DSNY, the City Council, our non-profit partners, residents, and staff all working together, we know we will succeed in boosting our City's environmental health and awareness, reducing NYCHA's carbon footprint, and improving the quality of life at our developments.

Thank you for your continued support. Your presence in the community, standing with us at our recycling events, inspires staff and residents alike.

We are happy to answer any questions you may have.