

CHAIR'S REPORT

FEBRUARY, 2018

Black History Month

As February rolls around we are reminded of Black History Month. At this time, it is compulsory that we dig through the history books to revisit a figure from the past that did something extraordinary in the face of unbelievable challenges or something ordinary that was not expected of a people that were classified as "less than". But, we are also living through some tough historical times. A climate of racist and bigoted policies and practices have been the underlying tone that have come out from upper levels of leadership from this country. The ongoing mass incarceration campaign against people of color and especially black men is underlined by the 13th Amendment "Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, **except as a punishment for crime** whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction." In essence once convicted, and under our judicial system, even before that, a prisoner essentially becomes a slave. As we celebrate and remember (sometimes learn for the first time) the achievements of people of African descent, let's not lose sight of the actions of those that are seeking to undermine the gains that have been achieved and the unity that binds us across our different ethnicities and cultural backgrounds. Let's continue to interact with each other in civil and respectful ways, seeing each other as humans deserving respect and love. Our political identities, our skin color, our socioeconomic status, should not define us or dictate the way we interact with our fellow Harlemites. Let's continue to add to the rich cannon of history that defines the African experience in America and move forward together as we are all stewards of our children, our future, and as the saying goes, "it takes a village to raise a child."

Victims of Fire at 3333 Broadway

As you may have heard, on Friday Feb. 9th a fire caused damage to some units in 3333 Broadway. As usual the response by leadership at 3333 was quick, decisive and supportive to the affected tenants. We offer our heartfelt sympathy to these affected families and hope that they are soon re-integrated into their former homes. In the meantime, we have offered our support to 3333 Broadway, we will be part of a meeting that discusses any needs and we have tapped into our remaining items that were collected for the November fire to assist with these new fire victims.

West Harlem Development Corporation

There's an interesting article in the Columbia Spectator which speaks of the role of WHDC in addressing the affordable housing problem. I understand that this remains #1 priority for WHDC and we will be supportive in their attempts to turn this around.

Please read the article below.

Columbia Spectator
February 13, 2018

[Nine years later, just 1 percent of Columbia's \\$10 million commitment to affordable housing has been spent](#)

By Juliana Kim

Outside the West Harlem Development Corporation's office, which sits on 127th Street between Morningside and Amsterdam Avenue, is a parking lot.

Though seemingly mundane, this empty space nestled between two buildings serves as a reminder that the group that was allotted \$10 million by Columbia six years ago to create and preserve affordable housing has been unable to spend most of it, thanks in part to rising property values and bureaucratic red tape.

To date, only \$100,000—or about one percent—of the \$10 million fund has actually been spent, The Eye has found.

To improve and foster its relationship with the community after the Manhattanville expansion, Columbia agreed in 2009 to invest \$150 million to benefit the local community surrounding the new campus in what is known as the Community Benefits Agreement. Not much later, the WHDC was created to directly administer and distribute \$93 million of that \$150 million promise.

In an effort to specifically alleviate some of the predicted housing pressures that the new campus would exert, the University agreed to dedicate \$20 million of the \$150 million sum to the Affordable Housing Fund, which is overseen by the WHDC. The CBA, which legitimizes the fund, stated that the money would be paid in two installments of \$10 million in accordance with Phase I and Phase II of construction, the first of which was transferred seven years ago.

But since Columbia transferred the first \$10 million installment to the city of New York in escrow in January 2011, the WHDC has faced delays from the city and increasingly expensive real estate, producing obstacles that have continued to postpone the spending for most of the decade, according to WHDC executive director Kofi Boateng.

Securing even this initial \$10 million was difficult for the WHDC. The organization was required to meet various conditions before receiving the money from escrow, one of which included finding a fiscal sponsor and an administrator for the housing fund. The WHDC entered a fiscal sponsorship agreement with the Tides Foundation in 2012, but it took it almost two years to send out an application (or a "Request for Proposal") to find an administrator. Boateng explains to me, "There was always talk, but you need time to get around."

What makes the Affordable Housing Fund even more complicated is that it wasn't necessarily designed to buy property without outside help. Instead, it was contrived to leverage more money from private and public developers whose investments would increase the amount of money the WHDC has to work with.

In the three years that the WHDC has tried to work with both the city and private developers, two proposals to buy land have fallen through, Boateng says.

The University does not oversee the WHDC nor hold a seat on its board. Nonetheless, both the University and Boateng confirm that they meet regularly to discuss the organization's progress and tribulations. Boateng also said that one solution the two discussed was to transfer some of the money from the In-Kind Benefits (another fund proposed in the CBA) to the Affordable Housing Fund.

Though \$10 million might seem like a large sum, Boateng explains that it doesn't go very far when you're in the business of buying property, and adds that it's not nearly enough to buy most available

properties in West Harlem. And as each year passes, real estate in the Manhattanville area becomes more expensive, creating a sense of urgency. "Availability is one thing," Boateng says, "but price is another."

The parking lot in front of the WHDC office, which was seen as a possible location for a development, would have cost \$36 million, according to Boateng—far beyond the allotted budget.

"Because we've been unsuccessful in developing, we're also looking at other strategies for preservation," Boateng explains. As of right now, the WHDC is test-running a homeownership-assistance program expected to give 33 tenants at 644 Riverside Drive the opportunity to buy their apartments and become homeowners. These loans would be payable in three years with zero percent interest.

Despite finishing all the paperwork on its end, the WHDC and the tenants accepted into this pilot program are waiting for NYC Housing Preservation and Development to finish its vetting process.

Although the WHDC hoped to finally use the fund and loan about \$100,000 for this homeownership program, the WHDC finds its hands tied until HPD approves, which Boateng predicts won't be until June.

Waiting seems to be a recurring theme in the efforts to use the Affordable Housing Fund—waiting for the money to be released from escrow, waiting for land proposals to go through, and now waiting for HPD to approve this program—but Boateng is not intending to let the prolonged wait for the second \$10 million installment to delay the WHDC. "We're doing the best that we can with the ten that we've got," Boateng says, "because we don't know when Columbia opens up Phase II."

While there is no clear timeline for the initiation of Phase II, it is set to begin following the completion buildings that will house the Business School, SIPA, and School of the Arts. Yet even if construction proceeds according to schedule, as the WHDC noted in the introduction of its request for proposals from prospective housing administrators, "The second installment may not materialize for at least 10 years from [2014]."

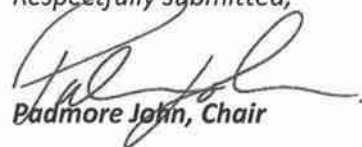
JTS construction

We are working with JTS to ensure there is representation of CB9 residents in their pool of workers that they are hiring. We have also made a connection between JTS and Strive, to allow for the development of pipeline of workers into construction jobs.

Application for Community Board

The BP's office has released the latest application for new board members and re-application for current board members. I encourage all community residents to apply, especially the youth (16 and older) and retired members of the community. Please be aware that serving on the board requires a significant time commitment, and anyone applying should ensure they have the capacity to be fully engaged with the issues the board and respective committees will be facing. Anything other than being fully committed to your role on the board will be a disservice to the board, the community and yourself. Please think carefully, discuss with family and other dependents to ensure that you will be able to full committed to the board.

Respectfully submitted,


Badmore John, Chair