

What We Do: UNHP & Mission

On 9/23/21 UNHP held a webinar that provided an overview of our What We Do: UNHP & Mission series of events that highlighted the core ways that UNHP works; as a mission-driven affordable housing developer, a Bronx-focused researcher and a direct service provider.

The entire webinar is available to watch on [Youtube](#), each event is summarized on [this blog post](#) and the finale webinar is [summarized here](#). In this document are some of the main takeaways from each of the three ways we work as we shared not only what we do, but why we do it.

Main Takeaways Community-based Housing Development

The building operator meetings provided space for like-minded building managers to discuss how the pandemic has affected their buildings, identify common issues and ways to address them.

Community based housing operators are always facing tight operating budgets as we prioritize keeping our apartments affordable and in good condition.

Reduced rent collections due to the pandemic combined with increasing costs, specifically around water and sewer and insurance are creating financial stress and constraints.

The [DEP Multifamily Water Assistance Program](#) which provides a \$250/unit credit helps reduce operating costs in affordable properties – increased budget and transparency needed

Rising insurance premiums, increasing requirements by lenders and agencies and difficulty finding carriers is creating a crisis - HIGH RENT PROPERTIES CAN AFFORD TO PAY HIGHER INSURANCE PREMIUMS WHERE AFFORDABLE PROJECTS CAN NOT

Since our meeting Emergency Rental Assistance Payments (ERAP) have started to come in – Fully funded and quickly delivered ERAP is critical.

Burdensome and slow moving marketing and rental programs to rent vacancies and house homeless families result in thousands of dollars of lost income to these properties as vacancies linger.

Main Takeaways- Multifamily Research and Action:

Values in the rent-stabilized real estate market have moved higher than anyone at UNHP could have imagined years ago. How those movements affect building conditions and tenants is particularly relevant right now, as the market is arguably more unusual than it's been in a really long time.

Prices for NYC multifamily housing (unlike most other real estate in the US) have dropped substantially over the past year or two, no one is buying or selling much, rental income has taken a huge hit, but “distress”, at least at this point, hasn't yet shown up in serious ways.

In an environment where debt levels on buildings are quite high, and where there is so much uncertainty about the future of particularly multifamily rent-stabilized real estate, banks are a business partner that is key to determining how all of this is going to play out. Banks need to think of themselves

as active stakeholders in ensuring good outcomes for buildings and for tenants, for the maintenance of safe, stable, and affordable housing.

Banks seem more open to a tenant or advocate based perspective than ever. Just during the pandemic, UNHP has had really productive dialogue with multiple banks as well as with bank regulators on their role in multifamily housing that feels new.

UNHP appreciates the perspective that both Chris Beck, Director of CRE Lending at New York Community Bank, and Rajiv Jaswa, Staff Attorney at TakeRoot Justice brought to the UNHP Multifamily Lenders meeting held in July about how tenant concerns can be addressed by financial institutions and incorporated into a given bank's due diligence based on their first-hand experiences. Chris has been a big force in helping bring tenant perspectives to one of the largest lenders to rent stabilized housing. From a business perspective, it's important that banks know more about their collateral, and being in touch with the tenants who experience living in that collateral every day isn't only a responsibility, but also helps them do that.

UNHP is gratified to see more lenders considering a tenants perspective but a rethink on the Community Reinvestment Act and its role in multifamily lending to benefit low income communities is needed. How can lenders move even further, for the benefit of tenants and building conditions and what else is needed to anticipate issues that may arise in the coming months and years? CRA is still the way that banks come to the table, and CRA regulation needs to encourage lenders to keep moving closer to what we mean when we say "active stakeholders"

Together with other partners across the City, we're looking at what we would expect ideally from lenders and CRA examiners:

- CRA downgrades if multifamily lending by a particular bank leads to harm
- Banks being forced to do proactive monitoring of things like harassment and physical conditions over the life of the loans they provide, particularly in buildings with risks of predatory landlord behavior
- Requiring banks put particular attention on expense levels, especially now that there is a threat of disinvestment after the last few years, and we know that so many building valuations -- and the loans associated with them -- can often be underwritten in a way that assumes very low expenses on buildings that sorely need serious work.

Main Takeaways- Resources for Bronx Families & Individuals

The Bronx was the borough with the most Covid cases in NYC.

The basis of financial stability is secure housing – housing that is safe, sound and affordable to the household that resides in it. The households we serve continue to deal with overcrowded apartments, high rent - and little to no disposable income, because even though many of our NWBRC users are "essential" workers, often the wages they make are not livable. This means that after paying rent - many households really struggle to cover other basic needs such as food and childcare.

Another piece of financial stability is access to bank branches, instead of alternative financial services like check cashers or pawn shops. During this time of increased uncertainty many banks have closed in the Bronx, as you walk around many of our neighborhoods, you see long lines at the few local branches and ATMs. The lack of access to financial institutions makes receiving unemployment benefits, stimulus payments, or the Advanced Child Tax Credit so difficult to reach those that need it the most.

In the face of all these simultaneous threats to families as well as the need to protect our staff and program users health - the Northwest Bronx Resource Center has had to adapt in order to continue helping households achieve financial stability.

Working in a remote and virtual mode, the NWBRC has worked to understand the new programs that have been developed out of the Federal American Rescue Plan, and share them in an understandable way with Bronx residents. To that end, the NWBRC has done extensive outreach to the 4000 plus past and present program users in our database through email newsletters, webinars, and texts. The NWBRC has delivered flyers to the tenants in the UNHP portfolio and set aside times to table outside the properties.

Working closely with our excellent building management company, Dougert management, we have been able to get close to 100 tenants to apply for the ERAP – good for the tenants and good for the buildings! Well-attended webinars reviewing the rent relief and other covid-19 programs to both English and Spanish speakers, helped to promote the programs to Bronx residents.

Jumelia also lead a two day webinar with other Bronx non- profits. “Talking with other groups who are focused on providing resources to Bronxites allows us to serve the community at large. We are able to share knowledge and expertise with other providers as well as refer clients to organizations that may be able to help them right away.” At UNHP, as part of our What We Do series- we wanted to communicate that Bronx groups can achieve more when they collaborate with one another and pull from the wealth of experience within the borough. Moving forward the NWBRC will continue to respond to emerging issues faced by Bronx residents towards the goals of financial stability and housing security.

Interested to learn more about our work and thoughts about community-based affordable housing, multifamily finance and the reality for Bronx residents a year after Covid? Read UNHP’s three part blog series: [A Year Into the Pandemic: Views from the Northwest Bronx.](#)