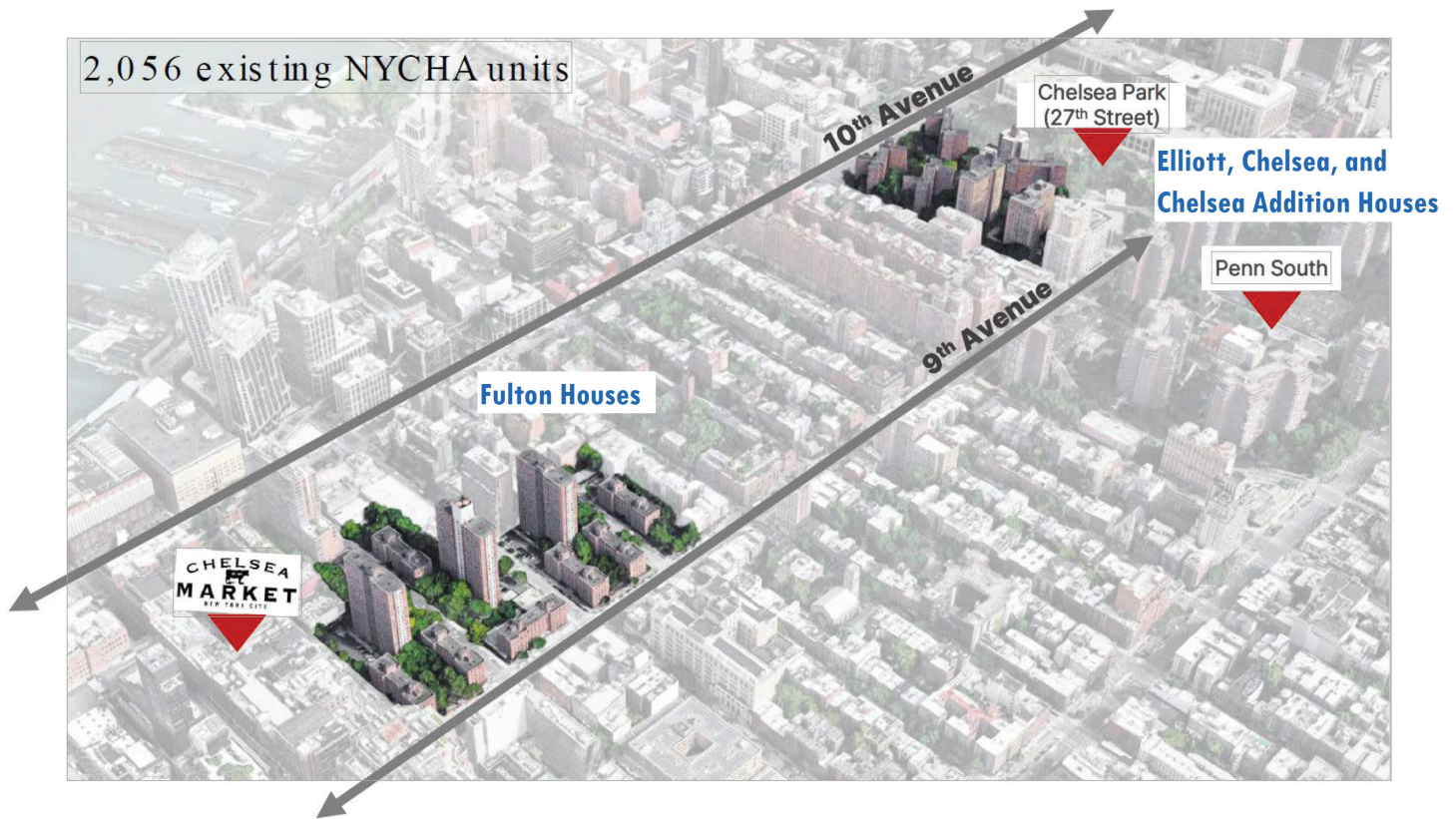


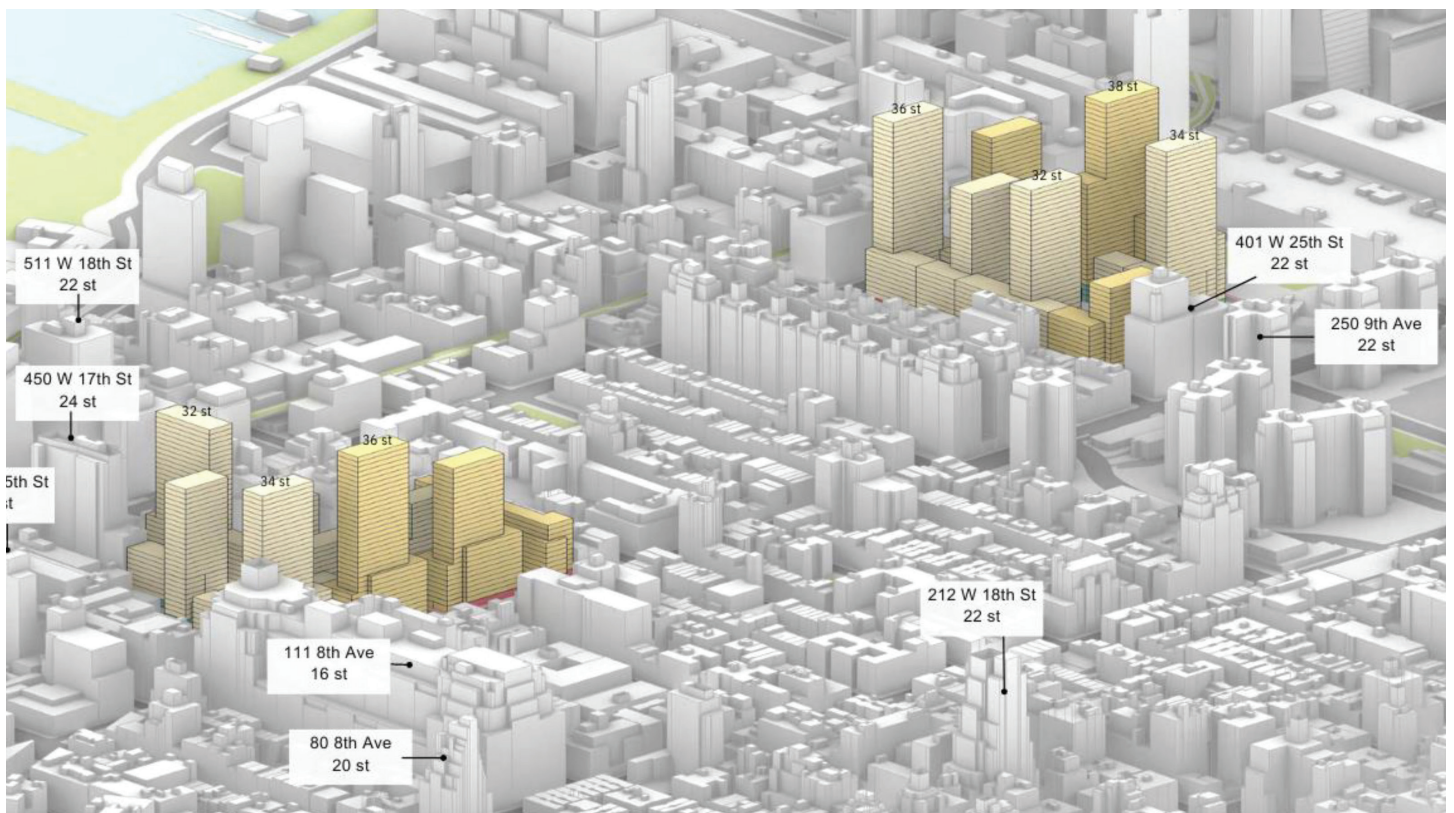
# **NYCHA's Threat to Chelsea's Historic Character**

Prepared by Save Chelsea  
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The New York City Housing Authority's planned redevelopment of its Chelsea public-housing sites—Fulton Houses and Elliott-Chelsea Houses—could transform much of the neighborhood to midtown-like density, introducing towers of up to 39 stories.

The NYCHA rendering below shows proposed new buildings in gold, viewed from the southeast. The darker-shaded buildings would replace the existing NYCHA ones and their 2,056 apartments. The lighter-shaded buildings include about 3,500 new rental units, about 1,000 to be affordable.



## Key Points

Related Companies won an Request for Proposals to renovate the buildings as NYCHA's development partner under its PACT program. Once selected, Related claimed to have found the buildings in worse condition than expected and that renovation would cost as much as replacement, leading to a demolition-based plan. Despite repeated requests, no detailed building condition reports or cost estimates have ever been released to substantiate this.

NYCHA has since admitted that the cost comparison between renovation and replacement did not include the costs of demolition or new-building design and approval, and that replacement will cost upwards of a billion dollars more than renovation.

NYCHA as never provided evidence that Fulton and Elliott-Chelsea can't be renovated under the PACT program like nearly half of its 335 other developments to date, and as originally called for under the Request for Proposals that Related won. NYCHA states that the existing buildings have no structural problems.

Despite earlier assurances that revenue from new mixed-income buildings would go only toward improved public housing for the current residents, NYCHA now says that perhaps all such revenue will go into its general fund for use throughout the city. This has clearly been the plan's motive from the beginning. Chelsea will foot the bill for funding NYCHA that the federal government refuses to pay, in loss of neighborhood character and adverse environmental impacts.

NYCHA says it will eliminate 260 bedrooms as part of the replacement plan, a permanent loss of deeply affordable public housing for future generations.

The plan will remove 370 mature trees that play a critical role in carbon capture, and exact a staggering cost in embodied carbon from needless replacement of structurally sound buildings.

Elected officials support the plan, which is widely opposed by residents of the Fulton and Elliott-Chelsea Houses and faces virtually unanimous opposition from the wider community.



## Historic Context



This map shows the historically sensitive context of NYCHA's Fulton Houses (in gray at left) and Elliott-Chelsea Houses (in gray at right). NYCHA's campuses stand across streets or avenues from multiple landmarked or sensitive sites. Fulton Houses shares a property line with Cushman Row (immediately to its right above), a standout feature of the Chelsea Historic District.

New York City-designated historic districts and landmarks are shown in yellow. From left to right, these are: the Gansevoort Market Historic District; the Chelsea Historic District; 437-459 West 24th Street (a row of twelve 1849-50 individually designated houses); the West Chelsea Historic District; and Holy Apostles Church (at lower right).

Diagonally hatched areas show other historically sensitive areas: Chelsea Market and other sites that are included in the National Register (but not New York City) Gansevoort Market Historic District; areas adjacent to the Chelsea Historic District that have been documented by Save Chelsea for inclusion in a Request for Evaluation of a district extension; and the western half of the block containing 437-459 West 24th Street, which includes other early houses and was protectively rezoned to a lower FAR in 1999.

Numerals indicate current FARs, and proposed FARs at the Fulton and Elliott-Chelsea sites which primarily now have FARs of 6. FAR, or Floor Area Ratio, is the amount of built square footage allowed by zoning on a site as a multiple of its lot area.



## Zoning Context



A major zoning change in 1999 protectively reduced FARs in historically sensitive areas, primarily from 6 to 3 or 4. These areas of reduction are shown in pink above. The Fulton and Elliott-Chelsea campuses (shown in gray at upper left and lower right respectively) were carved out of this initiative because they were publicly owned and protected from private speculative development. A 2005 zoning change accompanied creation of the Special West Chelsea District along the High Line. It allowed residential development in formerly manufacturing districts and increased allowed bulk, primarily from FARs of 5. These areas of increase are shown in blue above. While they include parts of the West Chelsea Historic District, its buildings already exceeded the newly allowed bulk.

These zoning changes were informed by a 197-a plan Community Board 4 initiated in collaboration with Columbia University in 1984. Among its stated goals were: “to preserve the character and visual unity of Chelsea; to preserve the traditional urban form and scale of the community; and to protect the [Chelsea] Historic District and other areas of historic character.” It was adopted by the city in 1996. Under its guidance, Chelsea (with Hell’s Kitchen) has produced more new housing than any other Manhattan neighborhood while preserving its historic character.

Not only did the NYCHA developments retain their FARs as surrounding areas had theirs reduced, but NYCHA now plans to dramatically increase them to allow development that would erupt incongruously out of its historic context.





## Fulton Houses and Context

Above is an aerial photo of the Fulton Houses, completed in 1965, viewed from the northeast. It conveys the development's simple but effective design concept. The development's 25-story towers were then of unprecedented height in the neighborhood, but their impact was reduced by their placement at the centers of blocks, set back to give light and space to the side streets and Ninth Avenue. Seven-story perimeter buildings step down to the largely low-rise context. The low NYCHA building on the right backs up to Cushman Row in the Chelsea Historic District, visible at the extreme lower right. At lower left are low-rise historic buildings that Save Chelsea will request to be included in an extension of the Chelsea Historic District.

In the photo at right, the nearest Fulton Houses tower is visible above the roof of the oldest house in Chelsea—404 West 20th Street—as viewed from the opposite sidewalk. As if by design, it falls just short of visibility above the roofline of Cushman Row to the right of 404.







Cushman Row is one of the nation's finest groups of Greek Revival Rowhouses and a highlight of the Chelsea Historic District. With the General Theological Seminary across West 20th Street, these 1830 houses contribute to one of New York's finest blocks. Today one can stand on it and imagine oneself in the 19th century. NYCHA's plan will bring modern high-rise construction discordantly into view, looming above the cornices of Cushman Row and its neighboring rowhouses.



The General Theological Seminary on the north side of West 20th Street was designed by notable architect Charles Coolidge Haight. He modeled it on northern medieval cloisters which traditionally formed courtyards open to the south for sunlight and had central, south-facing churches. NYCHA's plan would cast the Seminary and its park-like grounds into shadow for a significant part of each year. The full-block Seminary site was donated to the Episcopal Church by Chelsea's founder, Clement Clarke Moore. He envisioned it as a leafy focal space that would enhance surrounding property values and invite upscale residential development in the manner of Washington Square—it was in fact long known as Chelsea Square. Moore's hopes began to bear fruit when his friend Don Alonzo Cushman built Cushman Row across 20th Street. There is no more historically sensitive site in Chelsea.



The images at right from NYCHA's Final Environmental Impact Statement show the current view down Ninth Avenue from West 20th Street (top) and as it would appear under NYCHA's preferred redevelopment alternative, with proposed new buildings in white (bottom). These show how Fulton Houses' low perimeter buildings respect their context, which includes a low-rise street wall across Ninth Avenue largely made up of Greek Revival rowhouses with storefronts. NYCHA's wildly out-of-scale proposed buildings are from 12 to 36 stories.

The photo below provides a more real-world impression of such scale disparity. It looks up Sixth Avenue from West 25th Street. The first tall building on the right is 36 stories.



**No-Action Alternative**



**Rezoning Alternative**



The photo at right looks down Tenth Avenue from West 21st Street. While the 2005 rezoning for the Special West Chelsea District increased FARs west of the avenue along the High Line, a height limit of 80 feet was imposed opposite the Chelsea Historic District. This kept the new building seen at right in scale with the General Theological Seminary at left. NYCHA's plan makes no such accommodation.







## Elliott-Chelsea Houses and Context

Above is an aerial photo of the Elliott-Chelsea Houses viewed from the northeast, seen over Public School 33 in the left foreground and Chelsea Park in the right foreground. The campus is made up of three developments. The four lower red-brick buildings in the upper right are the John Lovejoy Elliott Houses, completed in 1947. To their left are the two yellow-brick Chelsea Houses towers completed in 1964. The taller building set among the Elliott Houses to their lower right is the senior-housing Chelsea Addition tower completed in 1968.

The entire Elliott-Chelsea campus is eligible for listing on the State and National Registers of Historic Places; it has been recognized as historically significant but not officially added to the registers, a step that would require NYCHA's agreement. The Elliott Houses are the work of notable architect William Lescaze, most renowned for his groundbreaking PSFS tower in Philadelphia. He also designed NYCHA's second ground-up development, the Williamsburg Houses, completed in 1938 and now both a national and New York City landmark. A renovation of the Williamsburg Houses was recently completed under NYCHA's PACT program.

The tan building to the upper right of the Elliott Houses in the photo is the R.C. Williams Warehouse, completed in 1928. Standing across Tenth Avenue in the West Chelsea Historic District, it was designed by Cass Gilbert, the notable architect of the Woolworth Building. It now houses the Avenues School.

To the upper left of the Elliott Houses in the photo, across West 26th Street, is the earlier mentioned half-block containing historic rowhouses, some landmarked.

The existing 11-story height of the Elliott Houses does not overwhelm this nearby historic context. NYCHA's preferred alternative would build a 36-story tower at the intersection of Tenth Avenue and West 26th Street, dwarfing these historic neighbors.





The Elliott Houses are seen in the background of this photo looking up Tenth Avenue from West 25th Street. In the right foreground is the historic block that had its FAR reduced under the 1999 rezoning to protect it from development. The tan building at left, across the avenue from the Elliott Houses, is the R.C. Williams Warehouse (now Avenues School), which is also pictured in the photo at right.

