



savechelseanyc@gmail.com
www.savechelseany.org

August 8, 2025

City Council Member Erik Bottcher
224 West 30th Street, Suite 1206
New York, NY 10001

Dear City Council Member Bottcher:

Save Chelsea strongly opposes NYCHA's plan for the Fulton and Elliott-Chelsea Houses (FEC). Its midtown-like density and grotesquely out-of-scale towers would be ruinous for Chelsea's character, and environmentally disastrous. It is extraordinarily unpopular for good reason. We implore you to end your support for the plan and join us in fighting it. NYCHA is using Chelsea as a proving ground for a rightly controversial new redevelopment model. It won't be auspicious if the agency is seen to defy its own residents, the wider community, *and* elected officials. Changing your position could make all the difference.

We do not accept the legitimacy of the 2023 survey by which residents preferred new construction over renovation. They were not told that the survey would be treated as a binding vote, suppressing participation. They were not told that renovation would take as little as two years, far less than the 5-to-8-year timeframe the survey cited for new construction. They were not told that the most popular alternative, new construction with rezoning, might dispense with current zoning's minimum-space requirements between buildings. It is doubtful they were informed how much they stood to lose in open space, light, air, views, and privacy. The survey didn't even use the word "demolition," possibly confusing respondents about the implications of "new construction."

The survey was also based on the fabrication that renovation would cost as much as replacement—a claimed toss-up that justified letting the residents decide. NYCHA now admits that replacement will cost upwards of a billion dollars more than renovation and that it had failed to acknowledge the costs of demolishing existing buildings and designing new ones. The survey results have been used to make what serves NYCHA and its private-sector partner Related look like the will of the residents.

Opposition to the plan by residents has surged as they have become more familiar with it. Running for city council on a no-demolition platform, Fulton Houses resident Jackie Lara recently won the electoral districts that contain the Fulton and the Elliott-Chelsea Houses; Renee Keitt won the presidency of the Elliott-Chelsea Houses Tenants Association as a no-demolition candidate; over 950 residents have signed a petition opposing demolition—nearly twice the number who had earlier chosen new construction on the dubious tenant survey; and when FEC residents have testified in NYCHA's public hearings and Community Board 4 meetings, the overwhelming majority have voiced opposition to the plan.

In the face of this evidence, it is insincere to say, as you did in Community Board 4's recent town hall, "I would never support a plan that I didn't believe the majority of the tenants supported." Your statement also tellingly leaves the wider community entirely out of your consideration—a community that has been virtually unanimous in testifying against the plan.

NYCHA has never presented a shred of evidence that FEC cannot be renovated under the PACT program like nearly half of the agency's 335 housing developments to date. It is clear that the overwhelming scale of planned new development was intended from the start to fill NYCHA's coffers for use throughout the city. The neighborhood will be upzoned beyond recognition to this end, not to benefit the FEC residents.

NYCHA also says that no new mixed-income development may be needed at all even to replace the FEC buildings, thanks to low-income housing tax credits, government bonds, and other financial incentives. But those incentives are meant to create new affordable housing, not subsidize demolition and needless replacement of structurally sound buildings to the tune of a billion dollars that could build affordable housing elsewhere.

You have said that you support the plan but oppose its segregation of public-housing tenants from mixed-income residents, but its construction sequence and timeframe are based entirely on completion of separate FEC replacement buildings before mixed-income buildings, ensuring segregation. In supporting the plan, you necessarily support segregation. It is as false to say otherwise as to claim you are respecting the will of the residents.

You have said you will ask NYCHA to increase the plan's public-housing capacity to offset the anticipated loss of 260 bedrooms to "right-sizing" of families into new-building apartments. That may be wishful thinking, while renovation would ensure their preservation. It is perverse that this plan would use Low Income Housing Tax Credits and other financial incentives for affordable-housing creation to permanently reduce public-housing capacity for future generations. It is shameful that residents taking the survey were unknowingly steered into trading in-unit washers and dryers linked to new

construction for hundreds of bedrooms. We know from their passionate testimony how much they value the role of public housing.

NYCHA's plan is indefensible on environmental grounds. It will worsen Chelsea's air quality—already the worst in Manhattan—both from particulate created during a minimum sixteen-year demolition and construction period and through long-term increases in traffic. It will overload combined storm and sanitary drains, dumping raw sewage into the Hudson River. It will worsen urban heat-island effect, exact a staggering toll in embodied carbon for needless building replacement in a time of climate crisis, and eliminate 370 mature trees that play a critical role for air quality and carbon capture, flying in the face of the Urban Forest Master Plan you sponsored. These concerns were unaccountably ignored or discounted in NYCHA's perfunctory and self-serving environmental impact statements.

These statements also failed to provide requested streetscape views showing how new construction will relate to sensitive historic context. Today it is possible to stand on Chelsea's Seminary block, the pride of Chelsea and one of the city's finest urban spaces, and imagine oneself in the nineteenth century. All of NYCHA's alternatives will bring modern high-rise construction incongruously into view from this block and cast shadows on it—beginning with the first Fulton Houses replacement building, which will loom above the cornices of Cushman Row, a nationally important ensemble of Greek Revival rowhouses. A rendering of this future view is among many requested of NYCHA in EIS comments but not provided.

When repeatedly confronted with the dishonesty and destructiveness of NYCHA's plan, you have always defended it for the thousand units of affordable housing it would create. It is wrong that this case was never made to us until the plan was a fait accompli. Affordable housing is a priority for all of us, but we were never asked what we would be willing to sacrifice for it. Many in the community see abandonment rather than leadership in your support of the plan, which imposes that sacrifice from without and seems likely only to increase our neighborhood's housing costs. Chelsea has shaped its own planning since Community Board 4 initiated a 197-a plan in 1984. We are proud to have produced more housing than any other Manhattan district while preserving our neighborhood's architectural heritage and unique identity. We are not NIMBYs who deserve to be circumvented, yet that is just what NYCHA's process has done.

The FEC campuses were excluded from Chelsea's 1999 and 2005 major rezonings as their public ownership was thought to protect them from just the kind of speculative development now in progress. Because they retained their allowed bulk as it was reduced for adjacent historic blocks, even NYCHA's proposed as-of-right alternatives would erupt violently out of their context, towering over and visually diminishing historically sensitive surroundings. FEC's zoning predates even the 1970 designation of

the Chelsea Historic District, which is adjacent to Fulton Houses. NYCHA's plan would nullify much of the effect of forty years of community self-determination, creating a much denser and taller new context that would only encourage further destructive upzoning.

You said in the town hall that there was no option to go back to square one. There is, however, a square one that would place the residents in decent homes in only two years, far sooner than the current plan and with far fewer adverse impacts—the original PACT renovation plan that was rejected on the basis of Related's unsubstantiated and self-serving renovation estimate. As Renee Keitt stated in the town hall, NYCHA and Related have consistently refused to provide detailed building-condition reports supporting their inflated renovation estimates. If they ever existed, why would they not have been shared? Why have you not demanded these yourself? Where is your vigilance on behalf of the community? How will you protect our interests going forward in the face of NYCHA's proven lack of transparency? If it weren't for Related hijacking the earlier plan—the "land grab" as it is popularly known—the residents would already be living in renovated homes.

Save Chelsea was founded to fight construction of a single 22-story tower on the grounds of the General Theological Seminary in the Chelsea Historic District. We never imagined we would see our neighborhood as existentially threatened as it is today. Chelsea is in the fight of its life—one that lends more urgency than ever to "Save Chelsea." We need you on our side in this fight, Council Member Bottcher.

We would welcome the opportunity to meet with you and your staff to discuss alternative paths and collaborate on solutions that better serve the long-term interests of your constituents and the city as a whole.

Sincerely,



Pamela Wolff, President

Cc: Congressman Jerry Nadler
Assembly Member Tony Simone
Senator Brad Hoylman-Sigal
Manhattan Borough President Mark Levine
Public Advocate Jumaane Williams
City Council Member Chris Banks, Committee on Public Housing
Attorney General Letitia James
Housing Protection Unit Chief Brent Meltzer, Attorney General's Office