



## NYCHA Proposes “Infill Development” in East Harlem

The New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) has announced that it is proposing to redevelop 14 sites within eight NYCHA developments in Manhattan. Under the proposal, referred to as “infill development,” NYCHA would lease the property for 99 years to private developers, who would build new mixed-income buildings that contain 80% “market-rate” apartments and 20% “affordable” apartments, and in some cases may have ground floor commercial or community use spaces.

NYCHA asserts that it lacks sufficient revenues to undertake the capital repairs needed in its properties, largely due to reductions in federal funding, and that this proposal will raise between \$30 million and \$50 million per year to make those capital improvements.

Public housing residents, local elected officials, community groups and others have stated their strenuous objections to NYCHA’s infill development proposal. Among the many concerns that have been



*NYCHA Executive Vice President Fred Harris addresses a community meeting at Union Settlement*



*A mural on the front entrance of Washington Community Center*

raised are: (1) the loss of open space and amenities in the NYCHA developments; (2) the need for additional consultation with and input from the affected NYCHA residents; (3) the lack of discussion of other ways to raise needed revenues; (4) questions as to whether NYCHA residents will be able to benefit from any permanent or construction jobs created by the proposal; and (5) the fact that only 20% of the apartments will be for low-income tenants, and even those apartments may not be affordable by local residents.

The 14 sites identified by NYCHA include three sites in East Harlem: two within the Washington Houses, and one at Carver Houses. All but one of the 14 sites NYCHA has designated for the first round of development contain playgrounds, parking lots or open spaces. The only site that includes a currently operating facility is one of the parcels at Washington Houses, which includes the Washington Houses Community Center, at 98th Street and 3rd Avenue.

The Washington Houses Community Center is a vibrant and active multi-service facility operated by Union Settlement, and that provides over 2,000 neighborhood residents each year with a wide variety of programs and services. The community center is the primary location for Union Settlement’s Youth Services program, which includes afterschool and summer programs, tutoring, arts enrichment, college prep, job readiness, pre-GED classes, life skills workshops, and assistance for young fathers

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## A Message from the Executive Director

Dear Friends of Union Settlement:

East Harlem is a community of constant change. This certainly is true of the demographics of the local residents – from the German and Irish settlers of the late 1800s, to the Italian and Jewish immigrants in the early 20th Century, to the large influx of Puerto Ricans and African Americans from the 1940 to the 1970s, to the recent immigrants from Mexico, the Caribbean, West Africa, the Middle East and China.

It is also true of the buildings themselves. There was no public housing in East Harlem prior to 1941, when the East River Houses were constructed. The next 30 years saw a massive redevelopment process, and East Harlem now has one of the highest concentrations of public housing in the country, with more than 20 separate developments housing over 30,000 residents.

The initial construction of housing by the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) was very controversial, and it permanently displaced tens of thousands of local residents. But the new developments also improved housing conditions for many individuals, who for the first time had larger apartments in buildings with elevators, reliable heat and hot water, and expansive open green spaces between the buildings.

As our cover story explains, we may now be seeing a new wave in the utilization of public housing land in East Harlem, with NYCHA proposing to fill in the open spaces in its developments, by leasing parcels to private developers who will construct mixed-income housing. The reason, NYCHA asserts, is that it has experienced significant cuts in federal funding, and does not have sufficient revenues to undertake much-needed capital improvements. The infill development raises significant concerns, and it is too early to tell if the proposal will move forward or not. We are working closely with public housing residents, our local elected officials and others on this issue, as we do with so many issues that have the potential to significantly impact our community.

We hope that you will continue to support us in our efforts to respond to these changes to continue to enhance the lives of the residents of this great community.

— David Nocenti



## Staff Spotlight: Gregory Downes



**Gregory Downes** started at Union Settlement in 2009 after an international career in finance. Greg grew up on the island of St. Lucia, attended the University of the West Indies: St. Augustine, Trinidad and Tobago and earned his Masters in Finance from the University of Strathclyde in Glasgow, Scotland. After completing his studies he worked with several businesses in St. Lucia, and in the United States after moving to the New York in 1994.

Greg currently works as the Director of Budgets and Contracts, managing government budgets and contracts for Union Settlement’s programs. Greg’s commitment to the mission of Union Settlement is one of the many reasons he enjoys his work. “Union Settlement helps others help themselves,” Greg said. “One of the ways we do that is by helping people get an education and progress. We provide services for people who might not have made it otherwise.”

If you happen to walk by Greg’s office throughout the day you’re more than likely to hear music. “If I don’t have music I’m lost.” His music tastes vary from Soca, West African, and Funk to new R&B, Pop, and Country artists.

Throughout his time at Union Settlement, Greg has worked behind the scenes to ensure the smooth operation of our programs. “My role is to make it as easy for the staff to do their jobs as possible.”

## Infill Development

*continued from page 1*

and disconnected youth. The building also is the home of one of Union Settlement's senior centers and a mental health counseling site, and it hosts multiple community events, including meetings of the Washington Houses Residents' Association, twice-weekly Teen Nights, and events held by local residents. The building also houses a CenterLight Healthcare program for the elderly.

Union Settlement has been working closely with local elected officials, NYCHA residents, the Urban Justice Center, Community Board 11, and other community stakeholders on this issue. Union Settlement and our allies are particularly concerned that, if the proposal moves forward, the Washington Houses Community Center must be replaced within the Washington Houses complex with no disruption in services to the community.

"Demolishing the community center and then constructing a new center on the site is not a viable option," said Executive Director **David Nocenti**. "We can't tell seniors in their late 80s, working single parents who rely on our after school programs, or older youth in our job readiness programs to just come back when a new center is constructed in three years. Every day at the center is a critical one for the families we serve."

In initial discussions, NYCHA has expressed a willingness to require developers to first build a new community center before taking any steps to vacate or demolish the existing facility. In addition, NYCHA has stated that residents within the affected developments would receive first priority for the affordable units as well as for construction and permanent jobs that result from the redevelopment.

The issue of affordability is a significant one, because NYCHA has stated that 20% of the new apartments would be affordable to households at or below 60% of Area Median Income (AMI), which is \$51,540 for a family of four. However, NYCHA has not indicated what the likely range of rents will be for these apartments. The median income for East Harlem residents is only \$30,759 a year, so unless the income targets for new affordable units are lowered or rent subsidies are provided, local residents are unlikely to be able to afford the new apartments.

Details of NYCHA's plan should be included in the Request for Proposals (RFP) that is expected to be issued to developers by the end of May, although many advocates are pushing for the RFP to be delayed until the issues noted above are addressed, and for a draft of the RFP be shared with the community in advance of its issuance to developers.

## Justina Sotomayor: 100 Active Years!



**Justina Sotomayor**, at 100 years of age, celebrated her birthday with a big smile. She has seen many changes in her life – from her move to East Harlem from Arecibo, Puerto Rico in 1951 to join her husband, reunite her family and care for her children, to the changing demographics of the neighborhood of East Harlem, where she spends her time participating in community life and has worked throughout her life towards positive efforts in the community.

When she got to East Harlem, she thought it was 'paradise'. "There were so many more choices of things to do and opportunities," she said. "You could leave your doors open and walk around the

neighborhood at any time without being bothered. You were safe."

She continued to work as a seamstress as she had in Puerto Rico, rising to the job of forewoman in a small factory, supervising dressmaking and finishing. She remembers earning \$35 a week.

Sotomayor raised her children and now lives with her son just a five blocks from the Union Settlement's Corsi Senior Center. Over the years, her family has grown and moved around the country. She has 16 grandchildren, 53 great-grandchildren and 28 great-great-grandchildren!

Sotomayor has been attending programs for seniors at the Corsi Senior Center for 25 years. When she first came to the center, it was largely attended by Jewish and Italian seniors. Today, mirroring the changes in the neighborhood's elderly population, the participants are mostly Puerto Rican, Afro Caribbean and African American with some Asians joining more recently.

When she was younger, she went on all the trips for seniors. She remembers a trip in the summer to a park with a lake that she enjoyed especially. She has done ceramics, crocheted, woven baskets, and much more at the center.

Yet some things never change – her circle of family and friends, who were there to celebrate her 100th birthday at Corsi Senior Center, where she spent the afternoon dancing, singing and smiling.

## Foundation Profile: New York Community Trust

The New York Community Trust, which was founded in 1924, is one of the oldest and largest community foundations in the country. The Trust has almost \$2 billion in assets and makes about \$137 million in grants every year. Through the generosity of thousands of New Yorkers past and present who set up charitable funds, the Trust supports a wide range of charitable activities that are essential to the well-being and vitality of New York City.

The New York Community Trust has provided Union Settlement with many grants over the years. Most recently, the Trust awarded Union Settlement a grant of \$50,000 to support the East Harlem Community Alliance. Launched in early 2012, the Alliance is a coalition of local businesses, non-profits and

religious organizations seeking to improve the quality of life in East Harlem, led by Union Settlement Association.

The East Harlem Community Alliance currently is focusing on three major initiatives: (1) "Hire East Harlem," which seeks to reduce unemployment by connecting East Harlem employers with job seekers in East Harlem; (2) "Buy East Harlem," which is an effort to generate additional economic activity by encouraging local organizations to purchase from East Harlem businesses; and (3) "Serve East Harlem," which seeks to connect local residents to available social services.

"We are very excited about this new grant from the New York Community Trust," said **David Nocenti**, Executive Director. "It is helping to build a network of organizations to work together to improve the East Harlem community, and demonstrates that Trust's longstanding commitment to underserved neighborhoods in New York City."

## GED Students Push to Pass Before 2014

Subway commuters may have noticed a new advertising campaign this year that encourages New Yorkers to "Finish Your GED in 2013." Of course students are always working to finish their education as quickly as possible, but why the big push for 2013 specifically?

Ask **Melissa Nieves**, the Director of Adult Education at Union Settlement, and she will tell you that the GED exam is set to receive a state-wide overhaul in 2014. "We don't know yet what the new GED is going to look like, so our main goal is to get students over the finish line," says Melissa. One of the major changes is that the test, which has been given on paper, will be administered on computers. For our students, many of whom are not comfortable using a computer, this presents an obstacle.

Adult Education staff and concerned parties around the city have put their heads together to help as many students as possible pass the GED before the test is changed. Union Settlement's GED pro-

*"We don't know yet what the new GED is going to look like, so our main goal is to get students over the finish line."*

*-Melissa Nieves*

grams, which include classes for both adults and teens, is participating in the Campaign to Finish, thanks to support from the Fund for Public Advocacy. This program offers 17-24 year olds who are close to passing extra support, helping to boost them across the finish line.

Students in the program meet with a counselor and map out issues that might impact attendance and classroom participation. After the initial meeting, the counselor remains available to students on a daily basis, ready to offer one-on-one and small group support services as needed. Campaign to Finish helps students to overcome these obstacles such as child care or job schedules and connects students with the services and support they need to focus on their educational goals.

While Campaign to Finish focuses on the short-term push of helping students pass the GED, achieving long-term goals is the overarching aim. Students thinking about attending college are connected with the College Readiness program, which supports them through the application process and coordinates college campus visits. Workforce training and job or internship placement is also available through our partnership with STRIVE NYC.

*Please help spread the word, and help young adults take advantage of this opportunity before the GED changes in 2014. Interested students should visit the Adult Education office at 237 East 104th Street to see if they qualify.*



# Volunteerism Blooms During Spring Season



*A volunteer from Ralph Lauren gardens with a student after school*

Each year over 500 volunteers visit Union Settlement, sharing in our mission to create opportunity in East Harlem. This spring several groups of volunteers have visited the agency for one-day projects to work with program participants and beautify our garden space.

El Sitio Feliz, our community garden on East 104th Street, demonstrates the wonderful contributions of volunteers. Last October, Superstorm Sandy caused a large tree to fall, destroying the garden fence and several raised beds that are tended by community gardeners. Union Settlement has very limited resources available for upkeep of our centers, so we turned to volunteers for help with both labor and funding to repair and renovate the garden. The **University of Miami Alumni Association**, **Viacom**, and several groups from **GrowNYC** have already made progress toward replacing the beds. We look forward to visits from **Garnier**, **The Yale Alumni Association**, **Popular Community Bank** and others. With their help the garden will look even more beautiful by the end of the summer than it did before the storm.

Volunteers also enrich our programs by engaging with participants. A group from **Morgan Stanley's Latino Network** recently spent the morning in our community room, sharing cups of coffee and career advice with Adult Education students. The volunteers covered the basics of resumes and interviews, and encouraged students to think through what they would like to do once they pass the GED. Afterward a student mentioned, "I had not been thinking of going to school beyond my GED; now, I am thinking about it." The volunteers enjoyed getting to know the students as well; one shared her story about starting a new career at the age of 45, a hopeful message for all the students that are restarting their education later in life.

Volunteers from **Neuberger Berman** delivered meals to 400 homebound seniors and helped the members of our Gaylord White Senior Center celebrate April birthdays. Neuberger employee and Union Settlement Board Member **Elisabeth Lonsdale** attended the party and commented, "The room was festive, the music set the tone and boy, can those seniors dance! I am so happy that we could make their day a special one."

Volunteer Coordinator **Ari Briski** works with corporate groups all year and sees their impact: "Volunteers are essential to our programming. We are very fortunate to have wonderful and involved corporate partners which support us by volunteering and much more."

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**"The room was festive, the music set the tone, and boy, can those seniors dance! I am so happy that we could make their day a special one."**

*-Elisabeth Lonsdale*

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*Neuberger Berman volunteers dance with seniors*

# 2013 Solutions Benefit



On April 16, nearly four hundred guests gathered to celebrate Union Settlement’s service to the East Harlem community. The gala honored two extraordinary leaders: **Eric Eve**, Partner, RLM Finsbury and **Tracy Dolgin**, President and CEO of the YES Network.

*“The residents of East Harlem deserve the same opportunity that so many of us take for granted: to be the best that they can be, and to have a legitimate chance to pursue the American dream..... The people at Union Settlement have been doing it [providing services and creating opportunity] day-in and day-out for 118 years, with no fanfare whatsoever. To be there every single day for more than a century, helping every immigrant wave that has made this country special, is noble, not to mention just basic common sense.”*



— **Tracy Dolgin**



*“I came to Union Settlement as a dropout with bridges burned and road blocks everywhere. My options were running out. After being out of school for 2 years, they got me up to speed. ... and I passed [the GED] with flying colors... I recently applied to college and hope to continue my education... Where would I be today if Union Settlement weren’t here? I don’t want to know.”*

— **Giovanni Classen**, Program Participant

*For more highlights and pictures, visit [www.unionsettlement.org/galapics2013](http://www.unionsettlement.org/galapics2013)*

# Ethnic Festival

As this newsletter goes to press Union Settlement is preparing to hold our 21st Annual Ethnic Festival on Saturday, May 18! This year we look forward to bringing **Savion Glover** (the Tony Award-winning actor, dancer and choreographer behind Bring in ‘Da Noise, Bring in ‘Da Funk) to lead a day of family-friendly fun and activities.

*If you miss it visit [Facebook.com/UnionSettlement](https://www.facebook.com/UnionSettlement) for highlights and photos*

**Follow Union Settlement on Twitter for timely updates on our programs, events and #EastHarlem news!**  
**@UnionSettlement**

## Donor Spotlight: Mac Caputo



**Mac Caputo** joined the Union Settlement Board of Directors in 1988 and after twenty years on the board he opted to continue his service as a member of our Advisory Council.

The grandchild of immigrants, Mac has a strong personal understanding of the challenges that East Harlem's immigrant families confront. This insight, coupled with his legal training and extensive experience in finance including nearly forty years at Morgan Stanley, have given Mac a wonderful base of experience to draw upon in assisting and serving Union Settlement. His leadership has helped to shape the organization for more than 25 years.

"Union Settlement has an extraordinary mission of creating opportunity and a marvelous record of profound and caring service to the community of East Harlem."

As a founding member of the John H.T. Wilson Legacy Society, Mac has once again demonstrated his dedication to Union Settlement by including the organization in his planned giving.

We thank him for his continued loyal friendship, dedicated service and generous support.

## Update: New Staff Join Union Settlement

Union Settlement is proud to welcome **Michelle Paige** and **Nina Dastur** to the Union Settlement team. Michelle Paige is our new Director of Early Childhood Education, and Nina Dastur serves as the Director of Policy and Advocacy.

Michelle Paige brings more than 14 years of experience in primary and early childhood education to her work. Michelle comes to us from the Children's Aid Society, with an expertise in overseeing quality child care and head start programs.

Prior to joining Union Settlement, Nina Dastur worked as a Senior Policy Analyst/Grassroots Policy Specialist at the Center for Community Change, where she researched and helped coordinate advocacy for national, state, and local policies and legislation. She also provided technical assistance to grassroots organizing groups and coalitions throughout the country on campaigns affecting low income constituencies.

**David Nocenti**, Union Settlement's Executive Director, commented, "We are delighted to add these two strong leaders to Union Settlement's senior management team. Their skills, knowledge, and experience will greatly enhance our ability to serve the East Harlem community."

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Union Settlement Association presents an  
**East Harlem Pride Mixer**  
*Owning Your Pride*  
A Fundraiser to Support the **Safe Space Network**  
**Thursday, June 6, 2013**  
6:00 PM to 10:00 PM  
Studio Simplicif  
109 East 118th Street  
New York, NY 10029  
Advance Admission \$40.00 | Door Admission \$50.00  
To become a **sponsor**, make a **donation** or for **more info**, contact *Jordan Boone*  
jboone@unionsettlement.org | 212.828.6026



**UNION  
SETTLEMENT  
ASSOCIATION**   
CREATING OPPORTUNITY IN EAST HARLEM

**HAPPY HOUR**  
*~ to benefit ~*  
**EAST HARLEM!**

**Join the Young Friends of Union Settlement for drinks and summer merriment in the West Village.**

**Come by to check out the DJ, enter the raffle to win great prizes, and meet some cool people.**

**Tuesday, June 18th, 6:30 - 9:30pm**  
**Le Poisson Rouge, 158 Bleecker Street**  
**\$15 advance, \$20 at the door**

**Tickets and More Information at**  
**[www.unionsettlement.org/youngfriends](http://www.unionsettlement.org/youngfriends)**