

BREAKING THE URBAN ISOLATION OF PUBLIC HOUSING IN NEW YORK CITY



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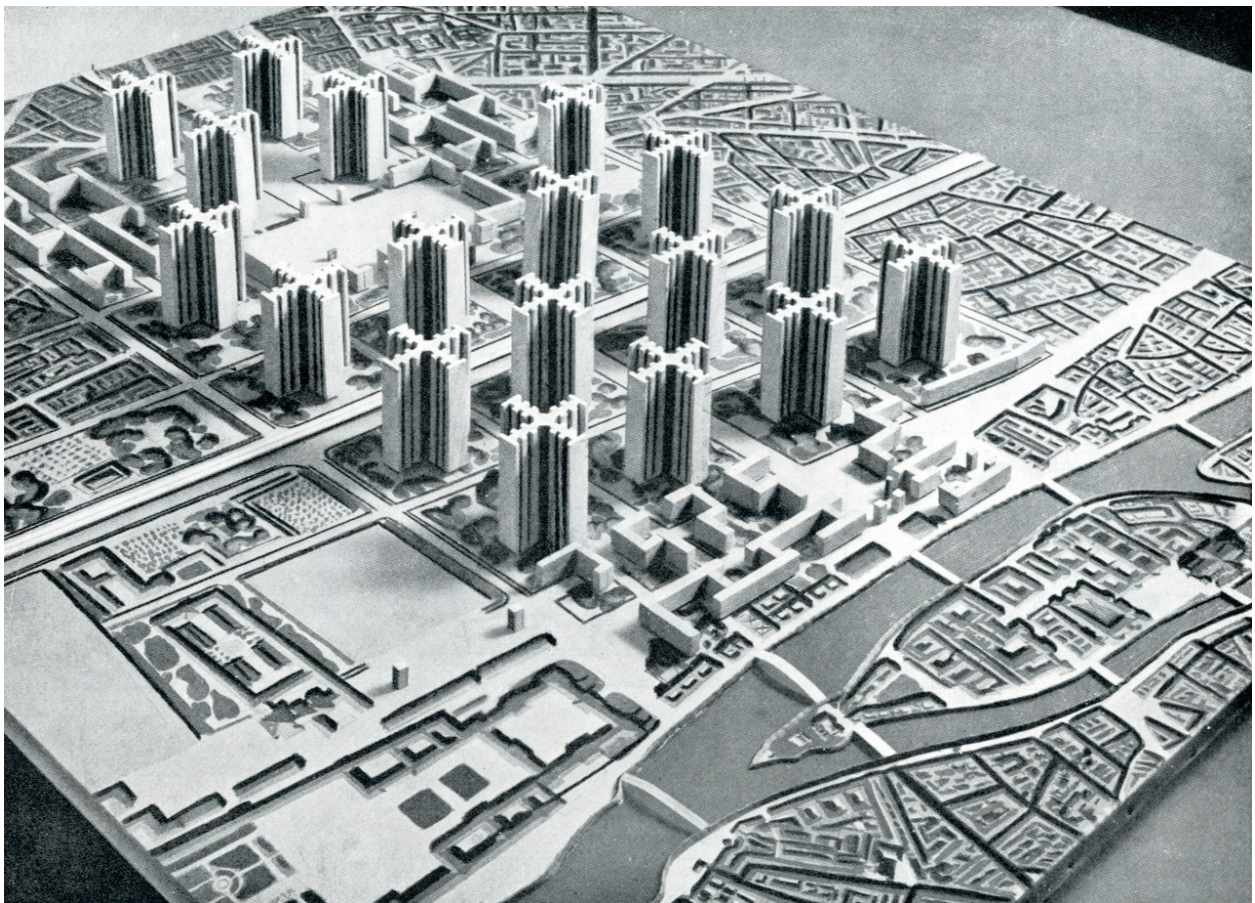
NEW YORK CITY COLLEGE OF
TECHNOLOGY CUNY

DINNER TALK
APSAA 2016 NATIONAL MEETING
2016.01.12

VIEWS OF FARRAGUT HOUSES DURING CONSTRUCTION (TOP) AND AFTER COMPLETION IN 1952.



CITY OF TOMORROW BY LE CORBUSIER



PLAN VOISIN FOR PARIS LE CORBUSIER, 1925

OVERVIEW OF PUBLIC HOUSING IN NEW YORK

PHYSICAL/SOCIAL CONDITION BEHIND CREATION OF PUBLIC HOUSING:

- Overcrowding
- Lack of adequate sanitary facilities: toilets, sinks, showers, tubs, water supply
- Lack of light and ventilation
- Incubator for Disease
- Crime
- Prostitution

SCALE:

- Addressing slums and housing problems became a large scale project tied to other initiatives coming out of the Depression era government programs
- Large scale is important: not an incremental approach, case by case basis
- No faith in market based fixes to problem results in full blown governmental intervention

DESIGN IDEOLOGY:

- The nature of the city as we know it is a thing of the past.
- A new city concept is emerging which has motor transportation at the heart of its concept.
- The Tower in the Landscape captures the imagination as the symbol of a modern city.
- Green space is pursued as a universal good no matter the impact on density or use patterns in urban environments
- High speed highway connections are the priority, cutting through existing neighborhoods as a necessary sacrifice.

THE ERA OF THE SUPERBLOCK:

- The street as a critical element of the urban environment is seen as anachronistic. Therefore the new city has no need to be conceived around the existing network of streets.
- Streets become superfluous and can be removed and erased by government officials or private developers.
- Land is consolidated into larger and larger parcels, with wide high capacity roads at their perimeter. The land is conceived of as a lawn, building on the suburban vision of land and home ownership providing a lifestyle "between" country living and urban living. The grass is a symbol of open space and escape from urban congestion.

- Within the superblock freestanding buildings are developed, sometimes snaking through the land, often concentric masses conceived as objects in the round. Space is provided between the structures as a logical response to provision of light and ventilation. Playground equipment is placed in the open space following further the suburban model where homeowners each buy play equipment for their kids, usually located in the back yard.
- Pathways cut through the lawns, connecting the sidewalks to the building entrances, sometimes distant from the street. The pathways meander between buildings, intended as places for casual strolling through a pleasant peaceful suburban environment. Here the narrowness, the cheek and jowl living of the slums is a distant memory.
- The closest relative to these superblocks is the American college campus quad, with academic and dormitory structures surrounding a green open space that provides critical downtime and recreational space for the student population.
- The superblock yearns for the success and usefulness of the college quad, for the inspiring communal activities and bucolic calming effect.
- Three key differences to the college quad undermine the bucolic goals of the superblock:
 - Lack of diversity in the architecture and the uses.
 - Nature of the population and the resources and needs of the population.
 - The spatial hierarchy of the quad is muddled in the superblock (relationship between public realm and private realm)

ACCESSING THE SUPERBLOCK TODAY:

- Success:
 - The greatest success of the superblock is undoubtedly the provision of light and ventilation to the housing units.
- Challenges:
 - Large Scale Concentration of Poverty
 - Mono-functional nature of Public Housing (lack of food/ services/jobs)
 - Non-street conditions (especially within the superblock open space) undermine the ability to police behavior amongst strangers
 - Building entries are often distant from the street, increasing risk of crime.
 - Stigma of the “Projects”, a population set apart from the normal living conditions of the city

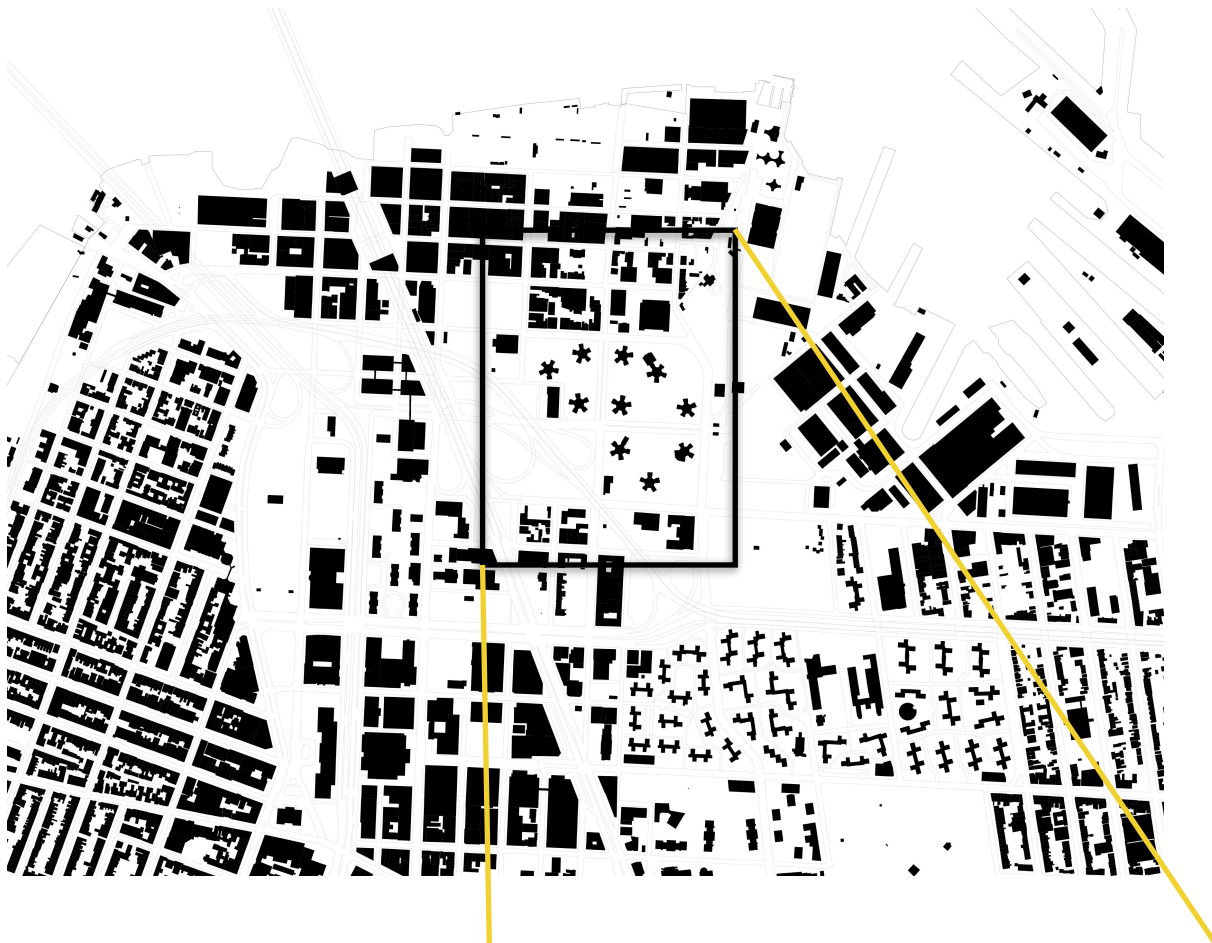
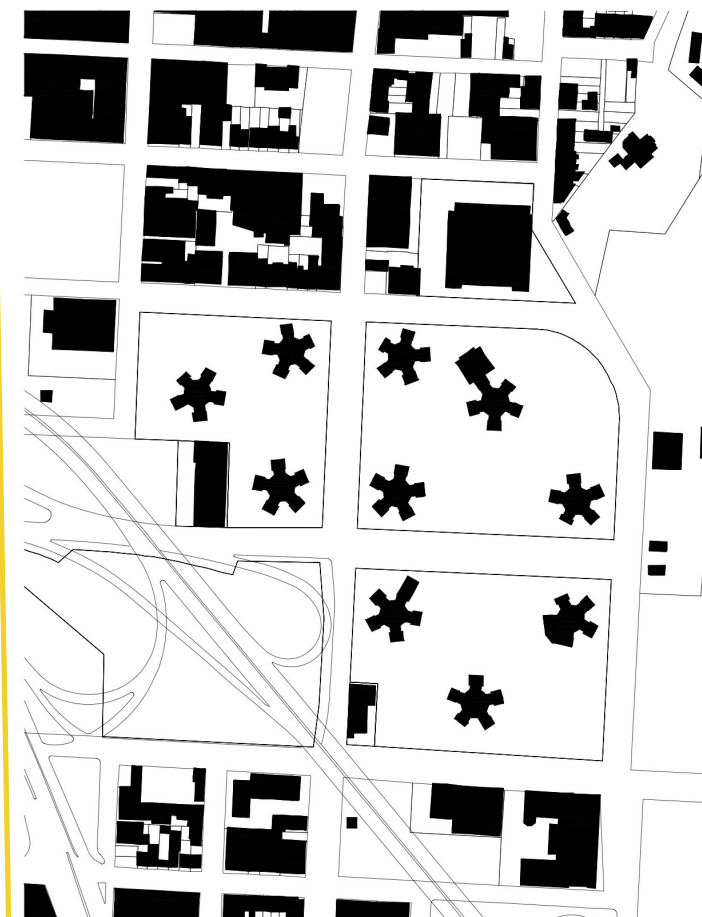


Figure Ground of Downtown
Brooklyn as Existing 2014



Detail Figure Ground of Downtown
Brooklyn as Existing 2014 zoomed in
on Farragut Houses



View of Existing Farragut Housing Massing



Study of Intensive Infill of Farragut Houses



1924 Aerial of Downtown Brooklyn



2014 Aerial of Downtown Brooklyn

THE DEBATE ON THE INFILL PROGRAM TO GENERATE REVENUE FOR NYCHA

Excerpt from POLITICO NEW YORK Sept 9, 2015

Link: <http://www.capitalnewyork.com/article/city-hall/2015/09/8576366/nycha-selects-wyckoff-gardens-holmes-towers-new-development>

“NYCHA will still face an uphill battle in trying to convince residents they’re getting a better deal in exchange for giving up some green spaces or parking lots, authority [chairwoman Shola Olatoye told POLITICO New York](#) earlier this summer.

Some residents may have what she described as a misplaced nostalgia for green spaces the authority doesn’t have the money to maintain. Those areas, she said, are sometimes strewn with trash or gated off, preventing anyone from using them.

“As someone who spent their childhood going to the Albany Houses in Brooklyn in the late '70s and early '80s, you have to go back a long way, like back to the '40s and '50s, to really be talking about the sort of idyllic utopian communities that [NYCHA] was envisioned to be. It hasn’t been like that in a long time,” said Olatoye, whose grandmother lived in the Albany Houses complex. “We have to poke holes in that nostalgia with reality.” Olatoye talks often about how much of her work involves “re-setting” the relationship between NYCHA residents and the city, after decades of tension and paranoia. Bloomberg’s proposal died under the massive weight of tenant opposition.

Excerpt from POLITICO NEW YORK August 19, 2015

Link: <http://www.capitalnewyork.com/article/city-hall/2015/08/8574445/city-housing-authority-head-prepares-fight-over-new-development>

But communicating NYCHA’s financial reality to hundreds of thousands of residents also has had its challenges. In recent months, Olatoye been heckled at public events, and town halls to discuss NYCHA plans have turned raucous and accusatory.

Housing advocacy and tenant groups already have voiced a variety of concerns about the plan, with some resident association leaders saying they want housing to be 100 percent available to current NYCHA residents. Some say they believe the housing authority officials have misled residents in recent town hall meetings held to discuss the plans for 100 percent affordable housing developments released earlier this year.

Olatoye doesn't expect the conversation around the plan to be any different. "I think it's going to be dynamic and it's going to be loud and we're going to have disagreements, and people are going to say things that in public that frankly when you pull them to the side they won't say," she said.

Excerpt from the GOTHAMIST Oct 21, 2015

Link: http://gothamist.com/2015/10/21/nycha_deblasio_protest.php

The plan to infill public housing spaces with private development was [first floated by Mayor Bloomberg](#) in 2013. Bloomberg proposed allowing developers to build 80 percent market-rate housing on public land. As a candidate for mayor, de Blasio was vocally opposed to the scheme.

"NYCHA land is not for luxury condos," [he told the Metropolitan Council on Housing](#) that year. But de Blasio made it clear that it was the details of the plan, not its broad outline, that he objected to. "Any future infill plan must include substantial amounts of affordable housing, the hiring of NYCHA residents for construction and permanent jobs, and the resources generated must be used to improve conditions for NYCHA families."

Javier Sepulveda, a tenant in the Dewitt Clinton Houses and a tenant organizer, said the city's [recent announcement of a funding package for the MTA](#) shows that there are other options. "The Governor and the Mayor just came up with \$26 billion for the MTA," he said. "They didn't have to give up any property. Why should we? It's a land-grab."

"This isn't a matter of money," Sepulveda said of the chronic underfunding of public housing. "I believe it's a matter of desire and will."

A handful of protesters briefly made good on their rhetorical threat to build on the Gracie Mansion grounds. Crossing out of the protest-pen set up by police, they erected a mock housing tower made of cardboard just inside the mansion's gates. "You call this progress," read words on the side of the cardboard tower. "We call it gentrification."

- THREE CASE STUDIES:

HOLMES HOUSES
FARRAGUT HOUSES
CHELSEA / ELLIOT HOUSES

UPPER EAST SIDE
DOWNTOWN BROOKLYN
CHELSEA

- HOLMES HOUSES:

Excerpt of Comments from IDEAS SESSION with Public Housing Residents to Address Proposed Infill Project. Oct 28, 2015

Link: <http://www1.nyc.gov/assets/nycha/downloads/pdf/holmes-vision-20151104-en.pdf>

- Need repairs at Holmes now
- Impact on prices in neighborhood w/more market rate tenants
- Views will be eliminated
- People will see residents in windows
- Fear: Residents being displaced in the long term
- Effects on community (gentrification)
- Overcrowding in the neighborhood
- Not enough parking for residents
- Will additional free parking spaces be added to our area?
- More pressure brought on by new market rate tenants to over-police and restrict residents
- Lack of walking open space

- FARRAGUT HOUSES:

Excerpt from the GOTHAMIST Oct 1, 2015

Link: http://gothamist.com/2015/10/01/schools_brooklyn_race_class.php

The rezoning would require predominantly white, upper-middle-class, **bursting-at-the-seams** PS 8 to move DUMBO and Vinegar Hill students to PS 307—a school that is currently under capacity, and predominantly serves African-American residents of the

NYCHA-run Farragut Houses. The proposal could go into effect as soon as the 2016-2017 school year.

"This is a bad plan," said Reverend Mark Taylor of The Church of the Open Door. A pastor in the Farragut community for 25 years, he says he was not informed of the rezoning proposal until three weeks ago.

"This plan omits obvious racial tensions," Taylor said. "We do not overcome, we do not reach diversity by playing like everything is alright. I suggest a period of no less than two years to develop a better plan to serve both of these communities."

"To say that race and class are not issues, and that... everyone is going to automatically flow together, is just naive at best, and dishonest at worst," he added.

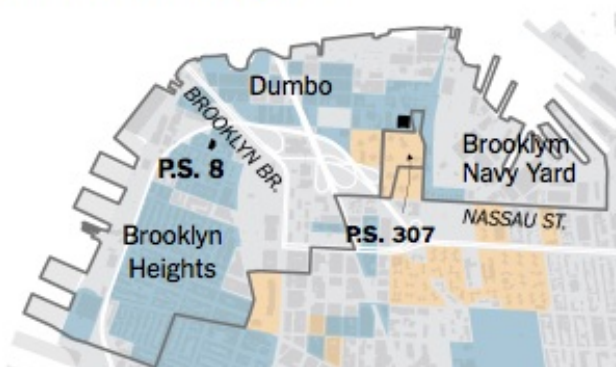
Asked to comment on the Farragut community's concerns, DOE spokeswoman Devora Kaye stated:

"These zones were created decades ago and no longer reflect the needs of Downtown Brooklyn families. We've proposed a solution that will address overcrowding and under-enrollment to create better schools for our students. We worked closely with the CEC, members of both school communities and engaged parents to collect feedback before the final proposal was submitted to best serve the community."

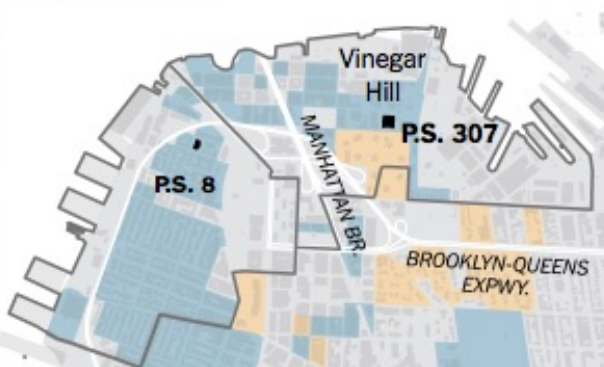
A teacher in the community for 18 years, she's been involved in the PTA since the 1970s, when her five children were young. She's lived in the Farragut Houses for decades, and said that watching DUMBO grow, she's felt a sense of unease and unwelcome in her own neighborhood.

Percentage of population that is black or Hispanic, by block ■ Less than 20% ■ More than 80%

Current attendance zones



Proposed zones



Sources: New York City Department of Education; Census

By The New York Times

"We're now the undesirables, but we were here before," she said, referencing the arrival of bike lanes and the expansion of the Brooklyn Bridge Park, even as her sons have experience an uptick in police harassment. "It's almost like we came into *their* space."

Race and Class Collide in a Plan for Two Brooklyn Schools

By KATE TAYLOR SEPT. 22, 2015



Parents and students at Public School 8 Elementary School, right, in Brooklyn Heights and at Public School 307, left, in Dumbo, Brooklyn. Michael Appleton for The New York Times, left; Sam Hodgson for The New York Times

Excerpt from NYTIMES Sept 22, 2015

Link: http://www.nytimes.com/2015/09/23/nyregion/race-and-class-collide-in-a-plan-for-two-brooklyn-schools.html?_r=0

For all its diversity, New York City, by some measures, has [one of the most segregated school systems](#) in the country, in part because many elementary schools are effectively closed off to children who live outside their zones. And although the Brooklyn rezoning is mainly a response to crowding, it is becoming a real-life study in the challenges of integrating just one of the city's schools.

During a meeting at P.S. 307 last week, residents of Farragut Houses expressed fears that their children would no longer be allowed to attend P.S. 307 and would be bused elsewhere. (Students who are already enrolled in P.S. 8 and P.S. 307, even if they do not live in the proposed zones, would not have to leave, according to the department.)

"We fought hard to build this school, and we're not just going to let people come from outside when we worked so hard and dedicated ourselves," Dolores Cheatom, a Farragut Houses resident, said at the meeting, holding her 1-year-old daughter on

her hip. She said she had “no problem working with anybody, but I’m not going to let anybody take from my daughter.”

Some Dumbo parents said they were anxious about their children’s being part of a racial minority in the school, while others worried that their children would not be sufficiently challenged.

“If you’re doubling the classroom size, what are the plans in terms of who are you hiring?” asked Lisa McKeon, a mother of two toddlers in Dumbo. “Who’s going to be training them?”

Research has found that minority students who attend integrated schools perform better academically and go on to earn higher incomes and have better health than minority students who attend segregated schools.

“We are all parents,” Mr. Greene said. “We need to start talking to one another and stop looking down on one another.”

Excerpt from WNYC Sept 22, 2015

Link: <http://www.wnyc.org/story/city-refines-its-pitch-rezone-two-brooklyn-elementary-schools/>

"If we want to really commit to growing this school and continuing to push this school to be the great school that it is, we want to make sure that it has a sustainable zone size," said Tim Castanza, from the education department's Office of District Planning. "And, as we keep saying, we do want to grow the enrollment at this school."

The school zone for P.S. 307 is tiny, and only includes the public housing apartments across the street. It enrolls mostly black and Latino students; most students qualify for free lunch.

Meanwhile, the zone for P.S. 8 is sprawling, stretching from Brooklyn Heights along the waterfront to the Brooklyn Navy Yard.

Excerpt from WNYC Jan 6, 2016

Link: <http://www.wnyc.org/story/change-zone-lines-marks-new-era-two-brooklyn-schools/>

"When rich people come in, they have the money to force people to do what they want," said Dolores Cheatom, who has a toddler and lives in Farragut Houses.

Cheatom spoke against the rezoning ahead of the vote at Tuesday's meeting. She and others expressed a feeling that the rezoning, and other changes being made in a gentrifying neighborhood, were for the benefit of newcomers rather than the Farragut community, the [longtime residents](#) of the neighborhood. They said that a rezoning could ultimately segregate P.S. 307 in the other direction: they feared the school would go from enrolling mostly black and Latino students to mostly white, middle class students -- [mirroring P.S. 8's history](#).

Despite the last-minute pleas to reject or postpone the proposal, the rezoning passed in a 6-3 vote, and members of the Community Education Council each spoke passionately about their views of the plan.

"We have to approach the elephant in the room," said Vascilla Caldeira, who voted in favor of the proposal. "Everybody says 'oh, it's not about segregation.' It is. Segregation of race, segregation of class, segregation of learning."

Building a high-quality school, she said, required parents rolling up their sleeves and getting involved.

N.Y. / REGION

In Chelsea, a Great Wealth Divide

By MIREYA NAVARRO OCT. 23, 2015

362 COMMENTS



Darlene Waters, a longtime Chelsea resident. Sam Hodgson for The New York Times

Residents of public housing feel increasingly isolated from and threatened by the hyper-gentrification of Chelsea.

\$100,000
30,000

NORTH OF 25TH

Price Range	Count (approx.)
\$10,000	180
\$20,000	150
\$30,000	100
\$40,000	50
\$50,000	100
\$60,000	120
\$75,000	100
\$100,000	120
\$125,000	100
\$150,000	20
\$200,000	50

SOUTH OF 25TH

Price Range	Count (approx.)
\$10,000	20
\$20,000	10
\$30,000	10
\$40,000	10
\$50,000	100
\$60,000	150
\$75,000	180
\$100,000	100
\$125,000	120
\$150,000	20
\$200,000	200



A [report](#) commissioned by the city and released in May studied the effects of gentrification on public housing residents and found benefits like safer streets and higher performing schools and students for those in wealthier settings. Coexistence, the

researchers found, also led to higher annual earnings for public housing households in high-income areas than their counterparts in poor neighborhoods.

But there were downsides. “The residents felt profound anxiety,” said Ingrid Gould Ellen, director of the Furman Center and principal investigator of the study, of which Abt Associates was co-author. “They appreciated the safety but they felt a loss, and daily expenses were greater and they felt great alienation.”

Juwan Stone, a resident of Elliot Houses who aspires to become an actor, spoke of sometimes overwhelming change.

The neighborhood feels welcoming in varying degrees, Mr. Stone said. He has worked summer jobs in the [High Line](#) park nearby and said he and his friends appreciated the free concerts and other entertainment the park offered. But he said some upscale retailers around him were “stores I feel would be uncomfortable to go in.”

The struggle with affordability has left some young people in public housing knowing that their neighborhood will not be theirs for long. Ms. Waters’s grandson, Justin Waters, 27, a computer systems analyst for the Hudson Guild, a community agency, said he did not see himself staying in Chelsea despite the advantages of the location. “Every single year, prices increase,” he said. “You shouldn’t constantly struggle to live somewhere. At that point you’re not even enjoying it.”

As government-subsidized tenants, public housing residents are protected by a federal policy that requires them to pay no more than 30 percent of their income in rent. But the fear of displacement persists nevertheless. Three years ago, the city took a parking lot from Elliot and Chelsea Houses to build 168 apartments for low-to-middle-income households, and it now plans another affordable building, at a parking lot and compactor yard at Fulton Houses, Housing Authority officials said.

“It’d be stupid not to think that, because eventually it will happen,” Ms. Sanchez, of Fulton Houses, said. “A company may say, we have enough to buy Nycha out. There’s somebody out there who’s probably saying, ‘How do we do this,’ because it’s prime real estate.”

Back in a more modest New York, Ms. Waters gets her hair done at a beauty school on 34th Street for \$15, and alternates among

three restaurants she can afford for the occasional meal out. As the vice-president of the tenants' association at Elliot Houses and president of the Hudson Guild's neighborhood advisory committee, she is now working with other residents to rent a van or a bus in November for a holiday shopping trip to New Jersey. In between cross-state trips, she studies shoppers and saves coupons before she hunts for deals closer to home.

But on balance, she said, "I'd rather have Chelsea as it is today. "There's more people," she said. "It's brighter, it's beautiful, it's more inviting than it used to be. We're very lucky to be able to stay in housing that hopefully will not disappear."