

**Remarks of Robert C. Rosenberg,  
Judicial Administrator for Development  
Chester Housing Authority Sustainability Committee  
March 16, 2011**

We have now completed five of the six phases of our “Tower’s” HOPE VI grant. Our three HOPE VI grants combined provide the very best housing in the city with a total of 603 new rental units and 100 affordable home ownership units. What remains to be done is the retail-supermarket center at Highland Avenue, the sale of the last 18 home ownership units at Highland Gardens, and, the final phase of the Towers HOPE VI Revitalization Plan. From inception, Phase 6 has been planned as a Community and Cultural Center. Unfortunately, those who originally pledged to provide the financial leadership to make it a reality are no longer available and financing of such a structure has become much more problematic in the current economy. However, we have finally found a way to fund the project by combining the 13,000 square foot center with a new 64-unit senior residence, complementing the two excellent facilities already on the site, Edgemont and Madison Senior Apartments. Funding will come from a 2.5 million dollar state RACP grant which requires 100% in matching funds, the developer Low Income Housing Tax Credits of \$13,397,105 and \$4,900,000 of CHA capital funds.

We listened to the community when we started the Chester Towers HOPE VI application process in 2003. Chester has deep roots in culture and the arts. The famous blues and jazz singer Ethel Waters was born here. From the outset what has been desired for the Cultural Center is a facility that offers opportunities for creative self expression, showcases the talent of local residents and provides training in skills that students and adults can use to earn an income, like computer and digital technology, printing, graphic design, carpentry, operation of radio broadcasting and recording studios, etc. This project is just as much an effort to create jobs and economic development to Chester as it is about providing young people a positive alternative after school.

By partnering with educational facilities, we hope to arrange for students to earn credits toward graduation, encouraging them to complete their education, and, offset the loss of such educational opportunities in our public schools. Arts education is known to keep kids engaged and in school.

The planned structure provides for all of these uses, plus a large multi-purpose room with a small kitchen for community meetings and various educational uses, expanding on the number of community members served at our new Neighborhood Networks center at the Booker T. Washington Community Center. We have worked closely with Chester Arts Alive! in designing the rooms and functionality of the structure.

Lastly, keeping our commitment to make the building a new gateway to Chester is a breathtaking 278-seat theatre for performances and performance rehearsals. The theatre, visible from I95, will attract a regional audience and be used for both local and national events. We are already speaking with various presenters to make this a singular attraction. The theatre will also provide opportunities for the Center's students to intern and apply their new skills, and, help make Chester once again a destination encouraging the formation of new businesses and jobs.

The combined structures will cost in excess of \$20,000,000 and result in creating over 25 new jobs in the residential facility, plus at least 15 new art and management positions. The affects of bringing new business and diverse activities to this particular area of Chester will result in hundreds of indirect jobs through restaurant and retail business activity, product supply manufacturing and distribution, and expansion of existing cultural & arts organizations.

Over the past 20 years, many have begun to point to "the arts" as a new way to revitalize America's urban centers. The arts have entered into the development schemes of cities of all types and sizes. In Newark, Detroit and Los Angeles, we see new museums, new theatres, and new performance venues-all designed to spark a renewed interest in our urban centers and to create a destination point or a reason to return to the city. Other cities are dusting off the cobwebs and restoring beautiful institutions-as Baltimore did, reopening the Hippodrome Theatre in 2002, after more than 25 years of neglect. Yet others, like Philadelphia, have even created arts districts designed to showcase the role of arts in the development scheme.

If we are successful in gaining local zoning and council approvals, with your support and the LIHTCs our developer applied for on March 1<sup>st</sup>, construction will begin this summer and the facility and residence can open for occupancy by July, 2012. We already have a long waiting list of seniors seeking to gain entry to the new residence.

Phase 6 is a triangular site adjacent to and overlooking I95 and presents many challenges including obtaining city approvals. The biggest issue has been our ability to add only a few more parking spaces on site. However, there is a total of 108 off-street parking spots on the Chester Towers site of which we would assume 40 for our seniors at one reserved space for each senior resident owning a car. Another 20 parking spots are used by CHA staff and visitors on weekdays, but are free for evening and weekend use by the Center. Thus, in reality there are always 46 spaces available for the Center and 78 on evenings and weekends when there will be performances scheduled. Even with a full house that should be adequate. In addition, we have signed an agreement for additional off-street parking immediately across the street bringing the total amount of available spaces to 103 weekday morning and afternoon and 146 during the evenings and weekend. In total, we plan to have more than adequate parking to handle any parking need.

To date, the Chester Housing Authority has brought several hundred million dollars in funds to the city of Chester for housing and infrastructure improvements. We are and will continue to be a part of this community. Large projects such as the Chester Towers Revitalization Plan take a long time to implement. For those of you who have been with us from the beginning we thank you. For those of you who are just joining us, thank you for coming--there is still work to be done. We need you to all stand with us in support of this project. There have been some alterations to the original sketches rendered almost ten years ago but the purpose, goal, and mission have not changed. While many plans, under the current economic climate have been shelved, this project, if approved by city council and awarded the LIHTC mentioned earlier will be ready for construction this summer.

In closing, numerous communities throughout the country have demonstrated how culture and the arts can be a driving force for economic recovery and growth. Cities across the country are looking to build their creative class; the truth is Chester already has a creative class. Chester deserves this center--- a facility where arts and educational organizations may come together, creating deeper impact on people of all ages through services, education, and economic development.