

Borough Monitoring – Initial Observations

January 11, 2022 (Period ending 4th Quarter, 2021)

Overview

The Borough Monitoring team is comprised of a borough lead and supported by the field examiners and subject matter experts in capital projects and building maintenance who analyze NYCHA systems data to inform priority areas for monitoring. The primary objective of the Monitoring team is to monitor and report progress NYCHA is making towards achieving goals set forth in the varied initiatives that support the creation of the new Neighborhood operating model. This effort will inherently overlap in certain areas where NYCHA endeavors to achieve commitments set forth in the organizational plan, action plans, HUD agreement, and to track progress towards addressing KPMG recommendations. Efforts will be directed towards evaluating whether operational components at the borough, neighborhood and development level are adequately supported and achieving broader central office goals.

Beginning in late August 2021, the Borough Monitoring team conducted initial interviews of assigned Neighborhood Administrators and various members of the Borough Management teams to assess the planning process and transition goals of the Neighborhood Model. The team has identified key areas of success and areas of improvement NYCHA should consider while continuing to develop the neighborhood model operating structure. Beginning in 2022, the team will conduct comparable interviews and key observations will be reported quarterly.

Preliminary Observations

Neighborhood Administrators (“NAs” or “NA”) indicated that they were generally unclear on expected roles and responsibilities in the new position, despite their reassignment in the first quarter of 2021. Many said that responsibilities have not changed from the prior Regional Asset Manager role to the NA role except for a change in title with a redistribution of geographic oversight and the hiring of additional staff to fill new NA positions. For those that had not previously served in the RAM position, newly appointed NAs expressed a lack of clear direction and inexperience. However, NAs acknowledged the benefit of the new assignment, citing less travel time¹ and a more reasonable distribution of developments under their oversight. The leadership and experience of NAs is disparate, and each borough separately tackles its vision for transition to the Neighborhood Model using different tools, collateral and imposing differing localized policies. There has been improvement more recently where communications have increased, and the general concepts of the Neighborhood Model goals have been disseminated by the Central Office. However, the lack of a clearly defined “end-state” makes anticipating change difficult for property management personnel. Key initial observations fall into the following areas.

¹ In most cases, travel time has been reduced with minor exceptions at Queens (“FHA”) scatter-sites.

Training

All staff expressed concerns about training gaps. For those with NYCHA experience in the maintenance vertical, management skills were identified as a priority. For staff with prior experience in property management, technical training to oversee skilled trades planners was of utmost concern. Staff in both categories equally expressed concern about increased, not yet known responsibilities for Neighborhood Administrators and corresponding training required to perform their new roles.

- Training is deficient and does not meet the needs of current staff. Areas cited by staff where more supportive education is required and should include:
 - Fundamentals of creating budgets (beyond usage of the FMS system).
 - Management and supervisory skills to manage staff/people.
 - Technical training to fill knowledge gaps; this includes training to ensure that NAs are equipped to take on new responsibilities to oversee skilled trades planners.
- Supportive programs for incoming property management staff are inconsistent and there is no structure to pass on institutional knowledge.
 - Mentoring programs are ad hoc on a voluntary basis.
 - Staff shadowing/partnering rarely occurs, thus missing the opportunity to pass on institutional experience from senior staff.

Human Resources / Central Office Support

Vacancies are consistently identified as the single highest risk factor that may negatively impact the success of the new Neighborhood operating model. Staff cited a lack of transparency around staffing formulas/determinations and reiterated that there are inadequate staff to accomplish required daily tasks.

Staff transitions occur in disparate forms across the agency. Lack of strategic planning at the development level around human capital has resulted in significant staffing challenges. Anticipated vacancies (e.g., retirement or terminations) are not backfilled quickly and result in operational gaps that may be avoidable. In one example, a retiring Neighborhood Administrator provided notice in August 2021 of his anticipated departure. The job posting to backfill the position was published at the same time of the staff member's departure resulting in a gap of at least one month where the borough has not had a manager to oversee the neighborhood. This causes a shift in personnel to provide coverage, which disrupts the premise behind the Neighborhood Model, and may cause an NA to cover developments further away. Additional gaps impacting property management operations are identified below.

- Lack of coordination between Human Resources and NYCHA IT when onboarding new personnel resulting in an inability to perform basic job functions. New staff often will not have credentials, permission, or hardware to perform duties.
- Little consideration of where staff reside when hiring and assigning staff. As a result, staff are often required to travel long distances from home² to assigned locations.
- Minimal consideration by borough management on certain staff hiring decisions. Hiring may occur mainly by HR for certain positions and staff are directed to report to developments without consulting borough leadership.
- Civil service rules negatively impact NYCHA's ability to hire qualified candidates.

² In many cases staff must travel between boroughs incurring significant unreimbursed transit and toll expenses.

- Supervisor turnover is high, and vacancies are not filled, despite hiring new line staff who require supervisors to train and oversee their work. Many experienced supervisors are leaving NYCHA, resulting in an ever-increasing outflow of institutional knowledge.
- Prescreening candidates is not occurring at the central office level and candidates are often unqualified who are selected to be interviewed for positions. This results in wasted time and effort evaluating overtly unqualified candidates.³
- Due to lack of resources, inefficient internal hiring procedures, and civil service rules, developments are often left with vacancies for long periods of time, sometimes up to several months.

Operations/Management - Decentralization

Decision-making authority for actions that impact development operations often bypass NAs and Borough Management. One staff member indicated that the Borough V.P. “cannot direct priorities for the developments.” For example, personnel actions are raised directly with the central office human resources division and bypass borough staff often leaving regional staff unaware of personnel actions and planning needs. Similarly, except at limited points during the year to provide feedback, borough management have no impact on capital projects and cannot adjust priorities within their jurisdiction to adjust shifting needs during the year.

Central office initiatives that originate in specialized units (e.g., TEMPO) are not integrated into daily NYCHA operations impeding coordination. In some cases, TEMPO will merely provide a list of locations and show up unannounced. This directly impacts property management staffs’ ability to communicate competently with residents in advance of work occurring. Providing advance notice to residents and information about scheduled work will help local staff garner a better relationship with residents and reinforces local accountability at developments. Lack of coordination also impacts Property Managers’ and Superintendents’ ability to coordinate scheduled work at developments, in some cases causing confusion and delay.

Development staff also perceive quality assurance and quality control as centrally supported and managed, allowing property management staff to extricate themselves from responsibility associated with quality assurance/control, inspections and enforcing standards. Staff indicated that the responsibility to conduct inspections and perform qualitative review of work performed should remain an expectation of managers and supers to promote localized accountability. This will also increase the perception by staff that accountability occurs locally and is not driven by central office review only.

Each borough employs differing methodologies to track performance. A combination of daily reports and checklists are generally used by and between the Development, NA and Borough V.P. Reports and checklists are different throughout the authority, varying in length, substance and form.

There was a notable discrepancy amongst and between the Neighborhood Administrators regarding perceived lines of reporting. In some cases, the expectation was that the Superintendent reported to the Property Manager, who in turn reports to the NA. An alternative view was that the Property Manager and the

³ In one example, the list provided to staff to fill an Assistant Superintendent position only included individuals who passed the test civil service exam, none of whom applied for the position, resulting in one candidate rejecting the offer. In another example, a candidate submitted by HR included a NYCHA employee from the civil service list who was deceased.

Superintendents both independently report to the NA. In some cases, both were viewed as a team and expected to interact with and report to the NA together.

Efforts have been made to develop a regular meeting cadence to share information within the property management vertical from the central office down to the developments; however, Neighborhood Administrators do not have a structured forum to share lessons learned and to discuss improvements amongst and between themselves as a group of managers. Although there has not been consistent instruction on this point, many NAs have begun independently organizing meetings.

Communication and Resources

NYCHA staff report generally encountering supporting equipment and resource (staff) challenges. For those staff promoted to NA positions who were formally RAMS, NYCHA issued vehicles were already allocated; however, all NAs do not have assigned vehicles which impacts their ability to move between developments. Workspace at developments for NAs varies with no clear direction or standard established for workspace needs. Reporting expectations have not been standardized and NAs have expressed concern that they will require staff to fulfill the robust reporting expectations of certain centralized offices (e.g., pest and waste management division reporting).

The impact of RAD/PACT conversions also has a significant impact on property management resources. Upcoming conversions require that skilled trades and local staff, including the NA, ensure that selected developments are ready for HQS inspections performed by HPD.

Communication to property management staff has improved during the last quarter of the year; however, staff continue to ask for more definitive information about what the Neighborhood Model is and how it impacts their job functions. Staff want to be able to prepare for change and communicate with residents clearly about what to expect.

Considerations

There was positive feedback and a feeling of optimism from many staff. Staff indicated that they were excited for the roll out of work order reform; are experiencing more support from some internal departments; and overall have seen a reduction in travel time and accessibility to developments. There was, however, also some level of anxiety and many open questions, in part due to many current unknowns.

Considering the information accumulated by the Borough Monitoring team in the last quarter of 2021, the team has concluded that there are immediate actions that may be taken to aid in the successful evolution of the Neighborhood Model. In the short term, considerations set forth below will be impactful and aid in boosting morale and helping to provide much needed clarity to staff. Longer term considerations for the Neighborhood Model's success are separately identified.

Immediate Considerations (1-3 Months):

- Level set physical/equipment resources by evaluating current needs of NAs to ensure parity, so they evenly supported (e.g., cars, space to work, phones etc.).
- Improve communication and require advance notifications from all specialized (central office) units to Borough V.P., NA, and Development Staff when work impacting a development is scheduled to occur.

- Assess current competencies and skills of existing NAs based on their individual backgrounds and train the current staff to address existing gaps. (Example: NA promoted through Property Management vertical who now needs to know and understand skilled trades).
- Communicate roles and responsibilities clarifying between operations and resident management (property managers and superintendents).
- Begin to develop and standardize templates for NAs to use for reporting to Borough VPs.
- Establish a meeting cadence that includes meetings between Neighborhood Administrators, Borough Planners and Property Managers/Superintendents, *facilitated by Borough VPs*. The goal of this meeting would be to introduce cross-communication within the property management vertical, to inform NAs of issues that current skilled trades planners encounter, and to prepare NAs to take on the responsibility of supervising skilled trades planners.⁴
- Create standards/guidelines for NAs to perform their duties and responsibilities.
- Provide a general, high-level timeline to property management staff explaining the end-state of the Neighborhood Model.
- Fill vacancies at all levels as soon as possible.

Longer-Term Considerations (1 - 6/12 Months):

- Assess how back-up equipment (bobcats etc.) may be made available (e.g., emergency or IDIQ contracting) when equipment is taken out of service to be repaired.
- Hire data analysts (at least 1-2 per borough) who report to the Borough VP to support NAs to perform their functions. Alternatively, these positions could report to PTAD and be matrixed to the Boroughs to provide necessary analytical support.
- Develop a framework to promote a feedback loop between Property Management Staff and NAs and procurement to identify poor quality vendors.
- Contract with a vendor to address all HQS inspections for RAD/PACT to free up skilled trade and maintenance resources.
- Develop a rolling training program aligned with the new Neighborhood Model and leverage experienced staff to take on mentoring roles.
- Hiring NA positions that report directly to the Borough VP, provide management planning/support/tracking, and can be repurposed to backfill positions in the borough in the event of absence or unfilled positions.
- Complete development and roll out standardized templates for NAs to use for reporting to Borough VPs.
- Provide a detailed timeline to property management staff explaining the end-state of the Neighborhood Model and a schedule of activities.

⁴ Work order reform may eventually address this issue; however, full agency roll-out will not be completed until the end of 2022. For those boroughs who are not in the process of rolling out work order reform, communications improvements facilitated by Borough VPs to include planners, NAs, and Property Managers/Supers should be prioritized. This will also aid in the eventual roll out of work order reform and provide some additional experiential knowledge to recently promoted NAs who are unfamiliar with the skilled trades.