

Borough Monitoring – Quarterly Report

May 5, 2022 (Period ending 1st Quarter, 2022)

Executive Summary

The Borough Monitoring team under the HUD Agreement is comprised of a borough lead supported by field examiners and subject matter experts in capital projects and building maintenance, who analyze NYCHA systems data to inform priority areas for monitoring and oversight. The primary objective of the Monitoring team is to 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 complements 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 supported and achieving broader central office goals.

This report identifies challenges, risks and accomplishments at a high level and is not a definitive statement on the success of initiatives that NYCHA is implementing. It is intended to provide guidance to the Monitor, NYCHA and other stakeholders on observations and the operational impact of central office initiatives. The Considerations identified at the conclusion of this report should be considered by NYCHA in the further development of the Neighborhood Model.

Initiatives/Operational Areas Reviewed this reporting period: Waste Management Division, Property Based Budgeting, Work Order Reform

Waste Management Observations

- The Pest and Waste Action Plan did not contemplate the Neighborhood Model causing some discrepancies between goals, resources, and programmatic execution. The relationship and roles between the central office WMD, Borough, Neighborhood, and Development have not been adequately formalized.
- Central office WMD policy development and operational changes do not fully account for development staff needs or resources.
- Property Management staff are not clear whether the development or the central office WMD is vested with authority to make certain operational decisions in connection with waste management.
- There is a lack of supervisory oversight at the development level to ensure that central office WMD policies and priorities are executed and properly performed by property management.

Property Based Budgeting Observations

- Borough assigned budget analysts are a significant resource and provide positive support to property management staff.
- Staff indicated a need for frequent budget training, that explains how budgets are developed and managed instead of targeted training for staff to take on newly assigned tasks.

- Oversight and assistive roles and responsibilities of the Neighborhood Administrators in connection with budgeting responsibilities of Property Managers has not been adequately defined and formalized.
- Staff indicated they are not clear on the extent to which they will be required to learn and manage additional components of the development budget and what the timeline is for such a transition.

Work Order Reform Observations

- The Work Order Reform initiative has significantly improved how work orders are scheduled, considering that each neighborhood now has a dedicated planner to schedule sequenced work directly with residents.
- The work order backlog, which was not intended to be included in the work order reform initiative, may negatively impact the rollout of work order reform. Emergencies, high priority repairs and ongoing specialized initiatives have unexpectedly impacted NYCHA's ability to resolve new work orders.
- NYCHA has not adequately communicated its broader plan to prioritize/address specialized work orders or those that arise outside of the skilled trades.
- Property management staff not previously trained in a maintenance role do not receive maintenance training which is necessary to ensure that Neighborhood Administrators and Property Managers have a general understanding about work performed by skilled trades workers and the time required to accomplish certain tasks.
- Maintenance workers are required to open work orders for observed issues while in a resident unit but have not been adequately trained to perform visual assessments (e.g., detecting pest infestations, assessing complex electrical issues).

Conclusions

NYCHA has made significant gains towards implementing transformational change by creating the Waste Management Department, taking steps towards shifting budget responsibilities to Property Managers and improving how the Authority responds to work orders. There is however a need to further develop a well-defined goal demonstrating what NYCHA will look like at the conclusion of its transformation. Staff will otherwise be left believing that there will be never-ending change. There is a significant gap in training across the organization, both for incoming staff and those that are tenured. Communication between Developments, Neighborhood Administrators and the Boroughs is acceptable; however, there are discrete examples within specified departments where formalizing a communications process would be beneficial. Finally, defining the functions and interdependencies between departments and the roles and responsibilities of staff will be a key component required to advance NYCHA's transformation to the Neighborhood Model.

Recommendations

At the conclusion of this report there are considerations to advance continued improvement of identified initiatives. The Monitor welcomes a dialogue with the Program Management Office, the Office of Strategy and Innovation, the Office of the Chief Operating Officer, and relevant Department Managers, to address identified challenges and to inform the continued development of the Neighborhood Model.

Observations

Beginning January 2022, the Borough Monitoring team conducted approximately thirty interviews of Neighborhood Administrators and various members of the borough management and development teams to assess progress towards accomplishing organizational change and alignment with the Neighborhood Model. Key areas undergoing transformation reviewed during the current reporting period include the Waste Management Department, the evolution of Property Based Budgeting and Work Order Reform.

The neighborhood operating model is still in development by NYCHA. Through various iterations NYCHA defined the Neighborhood Model as the reallocation of development assignments; the integration of mixed-finance and NGO¹ into the borough portfolio; the creation and assignment of Neighborhood Administrators; and the creation and assignment of Neighborhood Planners tasked to schedule skilled trades.

As the Neighborhood Model evolved, support services (Information Technology, Procurement, Human Resources, and Finance) were to be assigned to boroughs to support property management operations. Now, the Neighborhood Model includes multiple standalone initiatives initially introduced in the Transformation Plan such as Work Order Reform and the elimination of Alternative Work Schedules, now referred to as Property Based Scheduling. As the evolution of the Neighborhood Model continues, the Monitor anticipates the eventual transfer of current centralized functions out to the boroughs to support operations at the neighborhood and development levels. During one interview, management staff referenced rumors that HR staff may be placed in the boroughs. Most recently, NYCHA is developing a methodology to deploy Heating Plant Technicians to neighborhood assignments.

NYCHA is making progress accomplishing discrete steps towards the stated goals identified in its Transformation Plan. In all three areas reviewed, there are identifiable improvements that NYCHA has made in its attempt to accomplish wide-scale organizational change to align with the concept of “neighborhoods.” Significant work remains to transition the organization from its evolving neighborhood concept to a new neighborhood operating model which NYCHA has still not defined. Current organizational changes lack a clear vision or end-state that adequately addresses the functions and interdependencies between departments, or the roles and responsibilities of staff. NYCHA staff continue to insist that the central office simply “does not listen to the field [staff].” NYCHA has not clearly described what it will look like at the conclusion of its transformation leaving staff believing that there will be never-ending change. The prevailing concerns by staff across all areas reviewed this quarter are the lack of communication and inadequate training and resources (staff and equipment) to accomplish expected tasks.

Simply put, it is difficult to identify and implement needed change when a final goal is not plainly defined. NYCHA continues to build the plane as it is flies – but there is no destination. More discipline in the process

¹ NextGen Operations Developments (e.g., NGO1) are part of an initiative developed by former New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio and NYCHA. Mixed finance are developments that transitioned into the Section 8 program but remain under NYCHA management.

of defining their strategy based on realistic attainable goals, supported by identifiable resources, will improve results and garner greater support from those most impacted by impending change.

Waste Management Division

The HUD Agreement required the creation of a Waste Management Department (“WMD”), a Pest and Waste Management Action Plan, and set forth discrete pest and waste remediation goals. The Pest and Waste Management Action Plan details how NYCHA will fulfill its responsibilities under the Agreement with HUD and the United States Department of Justice. However, the plan does not present a specific strategy to identify functions, roles and responsibilities for pest and waste management, considering the decentralized neighborhood operating model NYCHA described in the Transformation Plan.² Lack of alignment is due in part to the ongoing development of the Neighborhood Model, which has continued after the establishment of the WMD and the Pest and Waste Management Action Plan. The Monitor will be working closely with NYCHA to update the Pest and Waste Management Action Plan, in part to improve how the Department supports the neighborhoods and local developments.

Waste management responsibilities are shared among different entities within NYCHA. The central office WMD develops policy; serves as liaison with the Department of Sanitation on behalf of NYCHA; and reviews and coordinates waste collection goals with management to assure that neighborhoods and developments are managing waste collection and disposal properly. The borough offices act as liaisons with central office WMD and take steps to ensure that each development manages the waste collection process and promotes effective resident waste management practices. Some Neighborhood Administrators also act as liaisons and report between the Borough V.P. and developments, in some cases they conduct follow up inquiries directly with the central WMD. Ultimately, the developments are responsible for day-to-day waste collection, storage, and preparation for collection. Development staff also are required to perform minimal maintenance, assess non-functioning equipment, and conduct daily inspection of the grounds.

The Monitor’s field observations and interviews with front-line staff suggest that the various interactions between property management staff and central office WMD are inconsistent across the boroughs. Reporting, notifications, performance standards and communications have not been formalized between the central office WMD, boroughs, neighborhoods or developments. This results in variations between how those entities perform their respective obligations.³

As a preliminary matter, it must be acknowledged that the work required by development staff is extensive. Staff is required to perform numerous tasks to clean and maintain the developments. Considering new initiatives, every position at the development level is experiencing modifications to current roles and responsibilities. While a policy mandate to perform additional tasks may meet the needs of the central office WMD, NYCHA’s reliance on local staff (e.g., Caretakers, Supervisors of Caretakers and Grounds, Maintenance Workers or Exterminators) to execute waste and pest management strategies requires more detailed consideration. For example, staff may not be capable or have adequate time to perform certain tasks pursuant to a directive of the central office WMD when adequate consideration has not been given to the cadre of other tasks required in that title. NYCHA’s Neighborhood Model Working

² The Waste Management Action Plan was submitted on January 26, 2021. NYCHA’s Transformation Plan was submitted on March 2, 2021.

³ There are nuanced differences between pest and waste management within WMD. Observations described below concentrate primarily on the waste management functions within the department.

Group is expected to develop a framework for WMD to consider how it coordinates with the new operating model and provides the services and support required by the neighborhoods and developments.

A notable demonstration of the breakdown between function, role and responsibility occurred in Queens at Oceanside, a consolidated development with Beach 41st Street. The Department of Sanitation for New York (“DSNY”) failed to collect garbage at Oceanside for several days, causing numerous complaints from residents and a neighboring school near the development. When the Property Manager contacted the Deputy Director of the WMD, he was informed, for the first time, that DSNY will no longer collect (curbside) at the development and was told it was a “done deal.” As a result, NYCHA development staff must now transport garbage ten blocks to Beach 41st Street. The sudden shift occurred without notification to the Property Manager or the Neighborhood Administrator, and no consideration was given to the resource requirements (staff or vehicles) to perform the new task. Appeals to the central office were met with a response suggesting that “... it isn’t a problem until you’ve tried it for a few months”, calling into question whether the WMD truly provides a *service* to front line staff as conceptualized in the Neighbor Model.⁴

Oceanside also reveals how other central office departments may impact property management operations requiring better coordination by NYCHA. Oceanside formerly included Ocean Bay, which was converted through the Rental Assistance Demonstration (“RAD”) program. As part of the RAD transition, Ocean Bay retained the waste E-Z Pack, equipment formerly associated with both properties, resulting in an additional unconsidered need at Oceanside that may have been overlooked. It is unclear whether the Real Estate Division, Property Management, or the central office WMD are ultimately responsible to consider the timing and need for the replacement of this necessary equipment. This example demonstrates that more work is required to “...better define the interplay between the service providers and local property management staff, [to] create[] a stronger relationship with the development.”⁵

The success of the neighborhood operating model requires better communication and consultation with operations staff by central office WMD to reinforce the relationship with the department and provide a voice to local development staff. A disconnect between the central office WMD and the operations staff was observed in various contexts. For example, each development has a site-specific waste management plan (referred to as “Individual Action Plans”). However, in developing those plans, according to development staff, neither the Neighborhood Administrator nor Property Managers were engaged to provide input or review site-specific plans. The central office WMD, however, reports meeting with local staff at each development to create individualized development plans which are provided to all property managers.⁶ This disconnect suggests that front-line staff continue to perceive the central office as simply pushing out directives limiting autonomy, despite the central office WMD’s engagement with local property management staff.

⁴ The Transformation Implementation Plan – Phase I describes WMD as a service provider whose role is to “create policy, develop[] strategy, and allocate[] central office resources to address discrete operational needs.”

⁵ Transformation Implementation Plan – Phase I, pp. 29-30.

⁶ The Chairman’s Office prepared initial drafts of Individual Action Plans (“IAPs”) for each development, comprising inventories of staff, equipment and resources available at each development. The Waste Department met with each development to review the draft IAPs, correct errors, add information not contained in the initial drafts. The second iteration of each IAP was given to each development for its use. The Waste Department, in conjunction with each Development, is working on a third draft to update and expand their contents.

Another example, albeit smaller in scale, is that Property Managers reported that they should be able to provide input as to the location and placement of cardboard recycling receptacles at their developments. This suggestion by local staff demonstrates the perceived sense of central control and confusion as to permissible decisions that may be made at the local development. We do not know whether this is widespread or an isolated report currently.

Additionally, operations staff expressed concern about delays for equipment repairs and replacements. One example involves an E-Z Pack at Mott Haven that has required replacement for six months. Maintenance workers are the first response and make simple repairs to equipment, but such repairs are limited by the maintenance workers' varying skill levels. Initial training must be a requirement before staff report into the field and refresher training must be ongoing so that NYCHA can rely on maintenance workers having a sufficient skill set. Moreover, if escalation is necessary, the super or Assistant Superintendent must contact the central office WMD for maintenance support.⁷ The time to address faulty equipment may be delayed due to limited staff, a backlog in repairs or long lead times for equipment and parts. When inquiring about whose responsibility it was to perform preventative maintenance work on waste equipment, surprisingly, supervisory staff were unsure whether it was local staff or central office WMD.⁸

Local operations staff at developments is responsible for waste removal. Caretakers and their supervisors are tasked with inspecting buildings and grounds daily, noting required repairs and performing visual inspections. When issues are identified, notifications are made to building superintendents and assistant superintendents to initiate work orders as needed. Work orders are generated mostly related to the maintenance and repair of waste chutes/hopper doors, compactors and other related waste collection equipment. Many responsibilities at the development level are basic responsibilities of proper building maintenance. Although staff is required to perform these functions, consistency is scarce and there is a diminished level of accountability occurring at developments, mostly for lack of supervision.

Challenges encountered by development staff to achieve pest and waste management goals are consistent with challenges presented in other Authority departments. Staff vacancies impact overall performance and employee morale. Limited staff coupled with Alternative Work Schedules resulted in many developments not being able to operate their trucks, negatively impacting their ability to move garbage around the developments.

Finance – Organizational Restructuring/Property Based Budgeting

The vision set forth by NYCHA in the Transformation Plan⁹ suggested that "... each Borough will have a Director of Borough Administration reporting directly to the Borough Vice President." The Directors were to be "... charged with organizing all the central office support functions in a way that improves service delivery to the neighborhood and property levels." The original proposal identified four specific support

⁷ Supervisor of Caretakers or Supervisor of Grounds would contact the central office WMD for exterior compactors.

⁸ Technical repairs e.g., changing the ram, changing hoses, working on the hydraulics and fluid is the responsibility of central office WMD.

⁹ An "Organizational Plan" is required in Paragraph 46 of the HUD Agreement. The Transformation Plan is the first part of the Organizational Plan and has been described by NYCHA as an unconstrained view of initiatives required to improve the organization.

departments¹⁰ which would place staff members within each Borough Office to support borough operations in furtherance of the Neighborhood Model. Collectively this new team was dubbed the Borough Administrative Team.

Since the drafting of the Transformation Plan, NYCHA has reevaluated the Borough Administrative Team concept and no longer plans to hire a Director of Borough Administration to supervise central office support staff. NYCHA now plans to reassign central office staff to the borough offices to prop up operational support while retaining reporting lines within the applicable central office division. In the case of finance, Budget Analysts have been assigned to support each borough while remaining in the central office. Borough management staff believe that “... there are plans to have an analyst embedded within the borough,” however, the Finance Department has not confirmed if that might occur. Property management staff at all levels have provided positive feedback, strong approval and appreciation for assistance provided by assigned budget analysts to support operations.

As part of the Transformation Plan NYCHA committed to “... review the current cost allocation methodology and develop an implementation plan to improve fee-for-service charges.”¹¹ The plan also detailed a two phased training program for property management staff. “In 2020 and 2021, Property Managers [were to] receive training in basic and advanced budgeting concepts, general ledger account structure, effective use of financial reporting tools, and HUD asset management concepts.”¹² Phase I goals, including initial training and increasing the responsibility of the Property Managers to oversee Budget Responsibility Group (“BRG”) line items, were completed in 2021. Property Managers actively participated in developing a portion of development budgets for FY 2021 and FY 2022.¹³ The Phase II training program will train staff on property-based budgeting, considering the asset management rules promulgated by HUD, and financial statements.¹⁴

The Implementation Plan describes Phase I training as completed but fails to mention its commitments to complete the training components described in Phase II. Nonetheless, NYCHA’s Chief Financial Officer has indicated in ongoing meetings that the Phase II training program is in development and NYCHA is working on a future training schedule. What remains are the financial reports and key performance indicators on which Property Managers will be trained according to Implementation Plan commitments.

Recognizing that finance training continues to evolve, field observations during this quarter concentrated on Phase I training and new responsibilities already vested in Property Managers to manage existing portions of development budgets.

Training

Staff has advised that while useful, the Phase I Development Budget training is insufficient, and staff has varying levels of understanding regarding how to perform their new duties. When asked, an operations staff member in Brooklyn indicated that a single training session on new responsibilities is not enough and

¹⁰ The central office support departments included information and technology, finance, human resources and procurement.

¹¹ Transformation Plan at p.45.

¹² Transformation Plan at p. 44.

¹³ Transformation Plan at p. 44-45.

¹⁴ Transformation Plan at p. 45.

“many managers [still] don’t understand how to manage their budgets or submit a budget modification request.” The staff member went on to suggest that more frequent and in-depth¹⁵ training is required.

In Manhattan, several Neighborhood Administrators did not recall taking the training and indicated that Budget 101 was the only training on budget for the year. They reported that the training did not cover “how to manage with insufficient funds.” This nuance demonstrates the training gap between how to make changes in the system of record versus developing necessary skills to assess how to manage with limited resources.

Property Managers also reported that the nuances of NYCHA specific systems and processes were not captured adequately in the BDO¹⁶ training video, making the added responsibilities related to budget management more cumbersome. For example, additional training on the Oracle system and reporting dashboards¹⁷ required to perform new responsibilities will be crucial. Staff said that more training is needed to reinforce budget preparation, monitoring and adjustments.

Roles & Responsibilities

In 2021 Phase I training was completed, and Property Managers were given new responsibilities to create development budgets and manage BRG lines. There are some inconsistencies in the property management vertical regarding the level of oversight, engagement and approvals required between the Property Managers, Borough VP, and Neighborhood Administrators.

For example, instead of actively managing Property Managers and developments by leveraging their experience to anticipate development needs, some Neighborhood Administrators view their role as merely advisory to help with budget revision and modification requests. Those Neighborhood Administrators insist they cannot provide more than advisory assistance because they do not know enough about planned work or the materials inventory on hand at developments necessary to complete planned work. Clarifying the Neighborhood Administrators’ role will promote consistency within the title and help Property Managers develop skills required to better reassess, evaluate and forecast resource needs. This was originally planned as an output by the Neighborhood Model working group but has been delayed from 2021.

Budget modifications and revisions were reported as confusing to staff. For example, in Brooklyn, while there was a general understanding of a ceiling for budget revisions without management approval, interviews demonstrated inconsistencies between staffs’ understanding of what revision amounts required approval, and from whom approval must be sought (Neighborhood Administrator, Finance Borough Liaison or Borough VP).

The perceived role of the Neighborhood Administrator varied when property management staff were asked about tracking and reviewing other areas impacted by budget. For example, not all Neighborhood Administrators review overtime. The Department of Finance has developed and is rolling out new

¹⁵ As indicated above, Phase II training is in development; however, field observations and interviews suggest that finance intently consider staff feedback and indicated needs.

¹⁶ BDO was contracted by NYCHA to develop training material.

¹⁷ The Finance Department recently developed additional reports that track overtime and headcount which will be introduced to operations staff in the second quarter. Training on the new reports at the time of the writing of this report is in development.

dashboards to support Neighborhood Administrators' and Property Managers' review of overtime. However, utilization of tools developed by the Department of Finance will be limited by the extent to which Neighborhood Administrators are aware of the expectation to review overtime and are adequately trained in using the new dashboard tools.

An established standard process for monitoring budgets, including clear key performance indicators that operations staff monitor would benefit the Borough VP, Neighborhood Administrators and Property Managers. It would also improve the accountability framework and create a foundation for reporting at NYCHA Stat. Performance standards and budget monitoring are currently limited to data captured by procurement and budget systems – additional standards established at the property or development level to monitor budget should be considered. As the year progresses, the Monitor anticipates that the Key Performance Indicator initiative will further develop a framework to aid Property Managers in their newly assigned tasks to develop and monitor budgets.

Decentralization and Localized Budget Autonomy

New responsibilities to manage component parts of development budgets have left many staff asking about the extent to which the boroughs, neighborhoods or developments will have budget autonomy, and when. Defining a future state and providing a timeline for change would benefit staff. Staff has advised that there is little discretion over spending. Limited control over supply sum and contract sum accounts does not allow discretion over how funds may be used. Property managers indicate that funding limitations and the lack of discretionary allocations eliminate their ability to fund special initiatives identified as priority projects unique to a particular neighborhood or development.

Work Order Reform

In 2019, NYCHA engaged a consultant to evaluate how to improve the organization's response to work orders. The initiative entitled Work Order Reform ("WOR"), first described in the Transformation Plan, resulted in a pilot that carried over into early 2021. Designed to tackle only new work orders and not the existing backlog of unaddressed work orders, NYCHA's strategy was to improve its responsiveness to resident complaints. The WOR pilot had positive results, and included testing changes to NYCHA's organizational structure, staff allocation and most notably the process of sequencing work. The new initiative was first instituted in Queens and Staten Island¹⁸ in November 2021 and scheduled for rollout in the Bronx in January 2022. Due to internal organizational changes, human resource challenges and an effort to consider lessons learned and risks revealed in Queens and Staten Island, Bronx WOR rolled out in March 2022.

NYCHA learned and acknowledged that a successful rollout of WOR required a significant increase in staff across a wide number of titles, including the creation of the new Neighborhood Planner role. This amounted to hiring additional skilled trades and development staff,¹⁹ alongside the creation of new processes and IT infrastructure to support how work orders were to be addressed. NYCHA also developed an internal communications campaign to train staff and provide residents preliminary guidance for impending change.

¹⁸ The project was initially piloted in Queens and Staten Island.

¹⁹ NYCHA 2022 Financial Plan contemplated phased hiring of 250 skilled trades staff and 200 janitorial staff.

There have been logistical hurdles during the rollouts in Queens and the Bronx, which were to be expected. At the beginning of the year WOR workstream meetings were suspended due to a handover of program management responsibilities, resulting in less coordination and communication amongst and between NYCHA staff. A further delay in the Bronx occurred when planner contact forms were not printed by the Central Office and delivered to the Bronx Borough Office until March 9, 2022. However, despite challenges, NYCHA is attempting to cultivate momentum for a major operational change across the Authority.

Neighborhood Planners and Secretaries are busy and have been able to satisfactorily schedule skilled trades appointments demonstrating process improvements. WOR has significantly improved how work orders are scheduled, considering that each neighborhood now has a dedicated planner to schedule sequenced work directly with residents.²⁰ There is concern by staff whether planners and secretaries will be able to continue to handle the volume of scheduling calls after full rollout. There are residents who are calling planners more than three times a day, and planners are often confronted with frustrated residents who call to schedule work that is beyond the specific trades that the planner can schedule.

Management staff said that two secretaries may be needed to sustain neighborhood scheduling. For example, in some cases, residents may call to schedule work from a Heating Plant Technician (“HPT”), or work associated with asbestos removal, both specialized areas that are not handled by Neighborhood Planners. Additional calls not contemplated by the WOR pilot will impact results. During the pilot, staff initially questioned whether one planner per Neighborhood was adequate. Staff continue to express similar concerns that the Neighborhood Planner “... could turn into a mini call center.” NYCHA may eventually need to evaluate whether one planner per neighborhood is adequate.

Work Order Backlog and Unanticipated Issues

Emergencies, high priority repairs and ongoing specialized initiatives have impacted both boroughs’ ability to resolve new work orders and realize the intended benefits of work order reform.²¹ Staff indicated that “... in many instances a resident does not report an issue until it becomes an emergency, or a TAP leader reports it,” causing Planners and Skilled Trades to “adjust on the fly.” Operational hurdles beyond work order reform contribute to complexities not contemplated during earlier pilot programming. For example, the extent to which WOR is impacted by delayed test results for lead; scheduling hurdles for asbestos testing and removal; follow up work related to mold for inspections; or delayed access to supplies.

Skilled trades supervisors and superintendents will aid in coordinating ‘high priority’ complaints, in some cases elevating certain work orders in the queue. It was reported by one supervisor that high priority complaints (e.g., elected officials) are elevated over open work orders in the queue, even when repairs may not be as severe. Skilled Trades workers are sometimes held in “reserve” to ensure staff availability for these priority matters. Planners and development staff are then required to readjust their repair schedules at a moment’s notice causing additional drain on resources. It is too early to infer a broad impact from this practice or whether this is systemic. However, further supervisory direction and clarity

²⁰ Previously planners were located only at the borough.

²¹ Examples include Ombudsperson Call Center established by the ongoing Baez litigation, which requires a response to complaints within twenty-four hours; special initiatives such as renovation repair and painting (“RRP”) or Mold Busters; or complaints/repairs by politically connected residents, Tenant Association Presidents, or NYCHA Executives.

around broader NYCHA policy may be required. Except for the numbered prioritization rubric embedded in Maximo, NYCHA has not defined a clear vision and communicated to staff how to prioritize work orders when faced with multiple competing demands.²² Ultimately, more staff will be required to complete expected work.²³

Multiple staff from both boroughs reported that the work order backlog should have been addressed prior to the rollout of work order reform because the backlog will impede the success of WOR. NYCHA has not adequately communicated its broader plan to address specialized work orders or those that arise outside of the skilled trades. Despite the intent of WOR to address only new work orders, one supervisor said “... planners have to juggle the work – backlog, routine work orders, emergencies, inevitably something gets ignored.” Staff want to better understand how NYCHA intends to address the work order backlog, and how WOR is one part in a multi-phased approach. NYCHA leadership’s plan to accomplish this goal is not widely understood by staff on the frontline.

Training

Property Management staff not previously trained in a maintenance role do not receive maintenance training. There is an identifiable knowledge gap and additional training is necessary to ensure that Neighborhood Administrators and Property Managers have a general understanding about work performed by skilled trades workers and the time required to accomplish certain tasks. There has been positive feedback from Neighborhood Administrators teamed with Neighborhood Planners who have a background in maintenance and repair, recognizing their own deficiency and acknowledging “... a second set of eyes and know how to prioritize emergency work” are helpful.

Staff members are informally assisting each other and providing on the job training and guidance for Neighborhood Planners. Borough Planners and Skilled Trades Administrators are serving as subject matter experts and acting as necessary facilitators and managers who oversee and support the new Neighborhood Planners. NYCHA staff are adapting to operational changes but require more formal training support and would benefit from an organized mentor program to be fully equipped to perform new roles. Training issues observed during interviews suggest that the level and depth of training required in the WOR program must be revisited.

Neighborhood Planners and Secretaries have not been provided adequate training on the work of skilled trades or skilled trades scheduling. An understanding of both is required for Neighborhood Planners and Secretaries to perform new functions well. A comprehensive training program for new staff was not developed as a component of work order reform. In the Bronx, borough staff provided training for new Neighborhood Planners and Secretaries on holding skilled trades in reserve; interpreting metrics and operations dashboards; and conducting effective searches in Maximo using filter options for individual units. One supervisor said, “[t]here has been no guidance, training, instructions, standardized procedures, roles and responsibilities provided by the Central Office for the [Neighborhood] Planners.” This will

²² The Managing Maintenance Work Orders SP updated 3/7/22, Appendix C, sets forth priority level service agreement completion deadlines, e.g., priority codes, but there is no known written guidance or training for addressing ‘high priority’ complaints described above.

²³ New York City Housing Authority Management and Maintenance Staffing Plan, All Boroughs, *prepared by TAG Associates Inc., October 2020*; Alternative Work Schedules Evaluation, *prepared by Public Policy Labs, October 2020*, Recommendations No. 2-3.

present serious future problems which will negatively impact the entire effort, especially if staff transition to new or similar positions in other boroughs.

Maintenance workers are required to open work orders for observed issues while in a resident unit but have not been trained to perform visual assessments (e.g., detecting pest infestations, assessing complex electrical issues). A borough supervisor explained that maintenance workers often do not have necessary skills and need extensive hands-on training in the field. He said in other cases, the workers are lazy, and the supers are too busy to hold them accountable or perform QA, or they are so desperate to hold onto personnel because “half of a worker is better than no worker.”

Staff members have varied levels of computer or smartphone experience, and an ongoing course with refresher training resources should be made available to staff. One Skilled Trades Deputy said new staff “... should have already finished training and been paired with more experienced workers to learn to use the handhelds, a tool needed every day,” and went on to suggest that new hires required at least three weeks and ideally two months to be trained in the field.

Hiring for Work Order Reform

Hiring additional staff required to support WOR has presented an additional layer of challenges for Human Resources and the Borough VPs. Exclusive of WOR, operations have long reported delays to fill staff vacancies. Despite planning well in advance to augment staff required to support the roll out of WOR, nearly every development within the boroughs suffers from missing resources due to vacancies. This has a trickle-down effect and further impacts accountability/oversight, morale, overtime, ability to adequately train new staff, and causes a lack of internal support between existing staff members to assist one another. These and other substantive challenges expand far beyond the nuances unique to WOR:

- Many provisional workers cannot qualify to become permanent.
- Estimated new lines for skilled trade hires are likely insufficient to address new work orders based on estimated need by NYCHA consultants.
- Overtime is increasing because there are insufficient staff to perform work.
- Neighborhood Administrators are being instructed to hire vendors to perform work to fill staffing gaps.
- Scheduling for certain trades is being pushed out by over two months for non-priority and non-emergency repairs.
- Workers are being promoted to positions for which they do not have adequate skills and experience.

Adjustments have been made during WOR meetings to address process driven delays; however, the “push and pull” between roles and responsibilities of operations and the human resource department exemplifies the need to define the relationship and roles more clearly between support departments and the operations vertical as part of the neighborhood operating model. For example, it should be clear with whom the responsibility sits to pre-qualify and vet candidates for a given position within the Authority. That responsibility may shift, but the development of roles and responsibilities within the neighborhood model framework should help proscribe the circumstances when that occurs and identify an accountable staff member. It is expected that these issues will be addressed in the Neighborhood Model Working group.

Continued Evaluation and Improvements

Ongoing meetings between the WOR project management team, property management staff, borough operations staff and the central office have been helpful to create a feedback loop between the parties to ensure continuous improvement. For example, NYCHA's Information and Technology Department has provided support to modify and improve the systems and tools used by the property management staff to capture, record and report work performed on work orders. Staff have indicated that they appreciate the improvements, but also recognize that technological improvements have their limits.

Considerations

Considering the information accumulated by the Borough Monitoring team in the first quarter of 2022, the team has identified areas of strength and weakness that must be considered by NYCHA for the successful evolution of the Neighborhood Model. The Neighborhood Model has been represented as a new operating model that seeks to integrate and address resident concerns and NYCHA's new way of conducting business. Operationalizing the individual "initiatives" that comprise the Neighborhood Model presents broad challenges. NYCHA leadership must define a distinct end state or goal for the "Neighborhood Model" that the whole of NYCHA staff is striving towards, so that front line staff can clearly see how new operational changes advance transformation to an ultimate organizational goal.

The Monitor welcomes a dialogue with the Program Management Office, the Office of Strategy and Innovation, the Office of the Chief Operating Officer, and relevant Department Managers, to address identified challenges and to inform the continued development of the Neighborhood Model.

Waste Management Division

- 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.
- Update development waste management plans and provide guidance to property management staff on communicating, training and monitoring staff on implementing plans.
- Define and communicate the WMD functional relationship as a service provider with the borough, neighborhoods and developments.
- Develop roles and responsibilities of property management staff required to implement WMD policy and goals; assess whether current property management staffing levels can achieve central WMD goals.

Finance

- Evaluate and redevelop training for property management staff on finance, budgeting and asset management. Consider staff needs and create a feedback loop to minimally close existing gaps and to ensure training corresponds with new roles and responsibilities intended to shift responsibility to the developments.
- Customize training presentations prepared by third-party consultants to NYCHA's organization and process to increase comprehensibility.
- Assign Budget Analysts to work out of the borough offices and develop regular meeting cadences with Neighborhood Administrators and Property Managers.

- Increase the frequency of reviewing and reconciling encumbrance reports to ensure unused funds are promptly reallocated to address development needs.
- Define and communicate to Property Managers what their roles will be when budget and finance obligations and responsibilities are transitioned fully out to the developments.
- Develop a formal mentoring program and provide support for staff to address current gaps in skills. (e.g., comparable to the informal relationships that have developed between borough and neighborhood planners).