

# EL BARRIO UNITE

elbarriounite.org  
info@elbarriounite.org

October 6, 2016

Neighborhoods First Fund  
C/O The New York Foundation  
10 East 34<sup>th</sup> Street  
New York, NY 10016

Dear Neighborhoods First Fund:

After two years of following East Harlem's participatory process to develop a community housing plan that purports to address the elements of concern of the very low income households of El Barrio in opposition to the Mayor's Mandatory Inclusion Housing (MIH) and Rezoning Plan, we feel it's necessary to alert you to our direct concerns. The process failed.

Roger Katan and Ron Shiffman wrote in the book Building Communities (2014- "Case Studies in Participating Planning", Pg. 270) of the '**Avoidance Model**' in participatory community planning. In this model, committees are formulated for the expressed purpose of circumnavigating the real agenda and instead resorting to countless overly structured and manipulative meetings and discussions that are designed and managed to keep the most important issues off the table. In this case the elephant in the room is how to house families earning less than \$29,000 per year into the East Harlem Plan for housing development projects.

Your funding has allowed the Community Voices Heard (CVH) and leadership to perpetuate the 'Avoidance Model' with the assistance of all 21 invited participated organizations who make up the East Harlem Plan. It is a disgrace to East Harlem Community of low and very low income households. After 2 years of meetings and countless discussions Community Board (CB) 11 has left those poor households in the cold. They are discounted.

Our first example is Block 1635, Lot 1 located on 107<sup>th</sup>/108<sup>th</sup> Street and Park Avenue. The city is awarding this parcel to the developers, L&M who now propose to exclude households earning less than \$29,000 per year in their development

plans for 390 apartments. Poor folks are being excluded from an ‘inclusionary’ housing project. How did this happen?

Our second example is the East 126<sup>th</sup> Street Burial Ground Site, on which CB11 Housing Committee recently (Oct. 3, 2016) supported a project on city owned land with no discernable fight to advocate for a protocol that includes very low income households into the development project process. What kind of participatory planning is this? On whose behalf? Why?

These deplorable examples took place under the nose of CVH, CB11, our City Council representative Melissa Mark Viverito and the other 21 especially invited participatory party leadership members who make up the ‘The East Harlem Plan’. Deplorable, yet funded.

Our parent organization N.E.R.V.E., Inc. was not invited into this select 21 Neighborhood Organization Planning Group (whose Boards do not represent East Harlem/ El Barrio), notwithstanding our 40-year history developing, managing, preserving, and advocating for low income household participation in El Barrio. We know of other organizations that were also excluded and discounted from the matrix that is now ailing our poorest sector. What kind of participatory nonsense is this? In addition, little concern for preserving the historic character and human scale nature of the neighborhood is included in this Neighborhood Plan. We sense a rubber stamping program in the works for development.

*“Obviously the lower the income of the community that’s targeted, the greater disparity in access, information and sense of ownership and empowerment in that process.”* Your Director, Ms. Joan Byron, made that statement earlier this year and she is proving it by funding this deplorable ‘Avoidance Model’ exercise in East Harlem/ El Barrio.

Later this month the American Planning Association (APA) and Speaker Melissa Mark Viverito will present the ‘East Harlem Plan’ at two separate functions hailing this model of community planning who by its very own recommendations mandates very low income inclusion into the housing plan under Article 1.2 found on page 86 of the East Harlem Plan. This is a terrible oversight and failure. Why is CB11 acting with no regard to Article 1.2? Why hasn’t the Planning Group made its own recommendations effective? To date, the Planning Group has not forwarded this requirement to the Community Board 11, nor

especially its CB 11 Housing Committee. This is a terrible failure of the East Harlem Plan CB11, by its own admission. It is time to stop this nonsense and react on the community's request!

Your funding of the East Harlem Plan is validating this avoidance model affecting the most important development of this EH Neighborhood Plan housing portion for the community of poor low income earning families. We are disappointed -to put it mildly- and we suspect that the city owned parcels are just being gifted to developers who are not in the least interested in delivering affordable housing to our lowest income families. The failure of the plan in allowing itself to be over looked and discounted by CB11 is a failure of its leadership. We opposed this leadership and this failure. We must act before all city parcels are awarded without a proper plan put into play and enforced. Otherwise your funding was wasted as well as the time invested by all community participants outside of the especially selected leadership. Deplorable, yet funded.

We call for a complete HPD moratorium on housing development, rezoning, and selling of city properties until a complete adaption of the East Harlem Neighborhood Plan (Article 1.2) is accepted and ratified by the NYC Council. To do less will signify the 'Avoidance Model'.

Sincerely,

El Barrio Unite

[www.elbarriounite.org](http://www.elbarriounite.org)

East Harlem Preservation

[www.eastharlempreservation.org](http://www.eastharlempreservation.org)

cc: Ford Foundation  
Surdna Foundation  
Deutsche Bank  
M&T Bank  
Mertz Gilmore Foundation  
Altman Foundation  
NY Community Trust  
NY Foundation  
The Scherman Foundation