



Ms. Marcia L. Fudge
Secretary of Housing and Urban Development
United States Department of Housing and Urban Development
451 7th Street South West
Washington, D.C. 20410

Dear Secretary Fudge,

Congratulations on your recent appointment and confirmation. We wish you all the best as you start this new chapter of your career.

This mission of HUD is an important one, and its impacts are especially felt in low income communities like Buffalo, New York, where the provision of affordable housing is one key to building stronger communities. Another key to building stronger communities, however, is to allow them to celebrate and protect their historic fabric and the places that are critical in telling their stories. Preserving these places builds a strong sense of pride, and has been a successful revitalization strategy in many communities.

In Buffalo, one such critical place is Willert Park/A.D. Price Courts, an historic African American housing project built in 1939, when FHA rules enforced housing segregation. The Buffalo Urban League and other prominent Black leaders fought to integrate public housing in Buffalo, but when it became clear that the white ethnic leadership of the city was not going to allow that, switched gears and successfully fought for a housing project of their own. The result was the modernist masterpiece, Willert Park Courts. Recognized by the Museum of Modern Art and the New York Times when they were built, the complex has since been deemed eligible for the National Register of Historic Places by the New York State Historic Preservation Office.

However, the Buffalo Municipal Housing Authority has been trying to tear down this complex for nearly a decade, despite strong community opposition. We understand the BMHA's position that new larger units of housing are needed for some of their residents, however, the answer to that cannot be to continue to erase Black history and dismantle historic Black neighborhoods. Especially when, in a one mile radius of this site are over 2,000 vacant lots, totaling three hundred acres of currently vacant land. The BMHA also has control over another nearby housing project (built in the same era as Willert Park but only allowing white residents) with nearly 900 vacant units. Forcing a community to tear down the places they love in order to access Federal assistance harkens back to the bad old days of Urban Renewal, and has no place in a forward thinking agency.

We have offered to work with the BMHA to bring a new developer on line who is interested in preserving and rehabilitating the existing historic complex into one that not only honors the significant community resource this is, but also meets modern day housing standards. We know that this can be done, it is simply a matter of will and skill.

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We are asking that you please come to Buffalo, allow us to give you a tour of Willert Park, talk to former residents, learn more about the importance of this incredible place, and direct the BMHA to work with the preservation community to save this unique and valuable resource for future generations.

Thank you for your kind consideration of this matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jessie Fisher". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Jessie Fisher
Executive Director

cc: Congressman Brian Higgins
Terry Alford, Michigan Street African American Heritage Corridor Commission
Sharon Holley, Michigan Street Preservation Corporation
Thomas Beauford, Buffalo Urban League