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 @WHWestchester

## Press Release

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**Contact: Anika Nahar, Campaign Communications Coordinator**

### **The Welcome Home Westchester Campaign launches to combat the housing shortage in Westchester County**

(Port Chester, N.Y.) A press conference was held to officially introduce the “Welcome Home Westchester” campaign, a multi-stakeholder effort to address the housing issue that has reached a crisis point over the past several years.



*Figure 1 Members of the Welcome Home Westchester coalition pose in front of the Regent Street Senior Apartments, an affordable housing unit in Port Chester, N.Y.*

The “Welcome Home Westchester” campaign combines several companies involved in the home building and development of housing with economic leaders like the Westchester County Association and Nonprofit Westchester, academics and think tanks that have extensively examined the housing question, organizations dedicated to fighting against homelessness and supporting families in need, faith leaders and community advocates to drive forward a new conversation around housing in the county.

The campaign intends to focus on several key areas: Reforming the way volunteer land use boards work and re-examining zoning to produce stronger, more resilient, and more economically dynamic communities.



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The campaign will also address the impact that the housing shortage has had on the economy, how it increases the difficulties in tackling climate resiliency, and how it significantly affects extremely low-income renters, people with disabilities, senior citizens, large families, and the homeless.

[An issue briefing on the current state of housing in Westchester and how the Welcome Home Westchester campaign intends to move the conversation forward is available here.](#)

“When it comes to housing, inaction has costs. Outdated processes in need of reform at the municipal level have costs. “The way we’ve always done it” has costs. Right now, Westchester residents are paying for all of them,” **Tim Foley, CEO and Executive Vice President of the Building and Realty Institute (BRI)** said. “We believe that a multi-stakeholder campaign like this one can make the invisible visible, with respect to the everyday barriers to providing the housing we need, and encourage communities to make different, better choices to secure a Westchester that is welcoming to all who wish to live and work here – to our shared prosperity!”

“At the Westchester County Association, we are pleased to be working with Tim Foley and the Building and Realty Institute on its Welcome Home Westchester campaign. The WCA has identified the shortage of affordable housing as one of our region’s principal economic challenges and last year we revised our Real Estate Policy Playbook to include a separate section on this issue,” **Michael Romita, President & CEO of Westchester County Association** said. “Adequate housing impacts directly the availability of a skilled local workforce for our businesses and nonprofits. It is not simply that there is not enough residential real estate. It is that the cost of housing is fast becoming out of reach for middle-class families. That threatens the long-term health of our economy. The BRI has heard the call and are helping take on this challenge.”

“Economic inequality in income and wealth has continued to widen since the Great Recession of 2009. With home equity accounting for nearly 30 percent of household wealth, affordable housing and home ownership must be a priority and legislative objective for communities committed to realizing opportunity for all people,” stated **Jan Fisher, Executive Director of Nonprofit Westchester**. “This will begin to address the life-limiting issues in health care, education and other critical areas resulting from



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systemic racism. We are proud to collaborate with BRI, government partners and other stakeholders in advancing affordable housing in Westchester.”

“There is no amount of taxpayer subsidy that will solve the problem without adequate supply of affordable housing. And the key to that is allowing the free market to operate without the discriminatory local zoning that has discouraged less expensive housing models,” **Alexander Roberts, former CEO and co-founder of Community Housing Innovations (CHI)** said.

“Along with many of Westchester’s parents, nonprofit workers who provide direct care to children are among those who are

most directly affected by our county’s housing crisis,” said **Kathy Halas, Executive Director of the Child Care Council of Westchester**. “The Welcome Home Westchester campaign is an opportunity to help these individuals, who serve as the backbone of our economy and quality of life, obtain the safe, affordable housing everyone deserves.”

“A diverse housing stock that is affordable to all members of our community isn't an issue that affects a small subset of residents in Westchester, but instead an issue that affects the vitality and vibrancy of our County and all stakeholders. Westhab is proud to be a part of Welcome Home Westchester as we pursue a more equitable and thriving community together,” **Rich Nightingale, President & CEO of Westhab, Inc.** said.

“We at Lifting Up Westchester believe that having a safe, stable and affordable place to live is the foundation on which all other economic and social advancement can be built. We are proud to stand with the other members of the Welcome Home Westchester Campaign who share our belief that if Westchester County has a range of housing options at all income levels our communities will thrive,” **Anahaita Kotval, CEO of Lifting Up Westchester** said.

“ULI Westchester/Fairfield supports fair, equitable and sustainable zoning practices that serve all segments of the housing market while strengthening neighborhoods. We are proud to support the Building and



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Realty Institute's Welcome Home Westchester initiative," **Mara Winokur, Senior Director, Urban Land Institute Northern N.J. and Westchester/Fairfield** said.

"As a provider of single-room occupancy housing in Yonkers, the YMCA is completely attuned to this crisis in affordable housing. The men who live at the Y, mostly low-income and working-class, need focused support from case managers in order to find permanent stable housing in Westchester County, which can take many months. We look forward to being a part of this campaign in order to continue to bring awareness and actionable change," **Lucria Ortiz, President & CEO, Yonkers Family YMCA** said.

"Since Habitat for Humanity New York City announced our expansion into Westchester County we have been welcomed with open arms by residents and communities throughout the region – so it is in this spirit that we add our voices to the Welcome Home Westchester campaign to ensure more New Yorkers can access a safe, healthy, and affordable home," said **Karen Haycox, CEO of Habitat for Humanity New York City and Westchester County**. "Joining the advocacy effort to streamline and update systems and structures to advance the cause of affordable housing is one of our first contributions to the affordable housing effort in the county and just the beginning of our commitment to building and preserving homes from New Rochelle to Peekskill."

"Wilder Balter Partners recognizes the local and regional need for affordable housing and are proud to be part of the solution in the Hudson Valley, and specifically Westchester County. We believe in working cooperatively with all stakeholders to find answers and to get the best results, more high-quality housing, for all parties involved. We applaud the Building and Realty Institute for formulating the Welcome Home Westchester Campaign and are pleased to be a part of it," **Jim Wendling, VP of Wilder Balter Partners** said.

The Housing Action Council is pleased to join the "Welcome Home Westchester" campaign. Through this effort, we can collectively direct greater attention to our housing needs and provide the advocacy and educational support necessary for change," **Rose Noonan, Executive Director, Housing Action Council** said.



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“Westchester is a great county to “Live, Work, and Play.” We just need more “Live” space, whether it’s affordable, work-force, market-rate, 55+, or senior living,” **Chris Murphy, Co-owner of Murphy Brothers Contracting** said. “As a lifelong Westchester County contracting firm, we’d like to see the county work together with the local land-use boards to simplify the building approval process for all types of housing.”

The location of the press conference, South Regent Senior Apartments, was chosen as an example of the type of high-quality housing options that the county needs more of, particularly for seniors, millennials, those needing supportive housing services, and working families. The senior housing building was a joint venture between developers Lou Larriza and Michael Martino and the nonprofit organization Housing Action Council. Both partners have extensive affordable housing experience. The Village of Port Chester supported the funding applications and expedited the land use process providing the fundamental approvals, making this development a reality.

Members of the “Welcome Home Westchester” coalition hope that this campaign will help steer the conversation on housing in Westchester County and create more opportunities for conversation and positive change around this issue. Through public education of the low-hanging fruit of revitalizing underutilized downtown areas and the “new Rust Belt” of unused office parks and commercial spaces, inspiration and education of grassroots activists and volunteers, and dialogue around the extensive policy recommendations made by the Westchester County Association’s Policy Playbook and the Westchester County Housing Needs Assessment, the “Welcome Home Westchester” campaign will help place Westchester at the forefront of the discussion on affordable housing and zoning reform.

For more information on the “Welcome Home Westchester” campaign, please view our issue brief [here](#) or visit: [welcomehomewestchester.org](http://welcomehomewestchester.org).

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