



**National
Public Housing
Museum**

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**“LIVING IN THE SHADE: OPEN SPACE AND PUBLIC HOUSING”
AT NATIONAL PUBLIC HOUSING MUSEUM JULY 23 –
NOVEMBER 12, 2025**

*Exhibit Takes Visitors On Visual Journey Through Changing
Landscape of Public Housing in New York City*

Chicago, Illinois (June 30, 2025) – The **National Public Housing Museum** is set to present *Living in the Shade: Open Space and Public Housing*, an exhibition depicting the vital role of open space in the daily lives of the millions of public housing residents who have called New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) developments home for more than 90 years. Admission to the exhibit is free and open to the public July 23 – November 12, 2025 at the National Public Housing Museum (919 S. Ada St., Chicago).

Living in the Shade explores the role of open space—large lawns and tenant gardens, paved paths and play spaces, shady seating areas and public art—in creating more livable, healthy, and thriving communities in NYCHA. The exhibit features large-scale architectural models, archival and contemporary photographs, renderings, site plans, and community testimonials.



The flower bed at Lafayette Gardens designed and tended by the 411 Gardeners for the annual NYCHA competition for best flower garden, 1972. Courtesy of the LaGuardia & Wagner Archives.

“Living in the Shade is a reminder that the places we call home are more than just brick and mortar buildings. Everyone deserves access to outdoor spaces that offer opportunities for respite, joyful play, family, and community,” said **Lisa Yun Lee**, Executive Director and Chief Curator of the National Public Housing Museum. “The history of public housing is also a history of the designers who plan open spaces, building managers who help plant trees and gardens, and residents who have fought for and reimagined the space around them. This exhibit inspires us to learn from past examples and missteps, and challenges us to create a future of beautiful, resilient, and healthy communities for all.”

Living in the Shade illustrates how open spaces are tied to issues of health and wellness, environmental resilience, community investment, and changing social needs of public housing residents. It assesses the successes and failures of NYCHA’s landscaping efforts across decades, from New Deal-era courtyard buildings to midcentury tower-in-the-park superblocks to new renovation strategies. The exhibition also explores the role of greenery—including NYCHA’s extensive tree canopy that contributes to cooler neighborhoods—public art, playgrounds, and resident-inspired design projects. It also reveals a complex story about urban landscape design and the roles that residents, administrators, and designers have had in reimagining and reshaping public housing communities.

The exhibit is co-curated by **Matthias Altwicker**, Professor of Architecture at the New York Institute of Technology, and **Nicholas Dagen Bloom**, Professor of Urban Policy and Planning at Hunter College. *Living in the Shade* was previously exhibited in New York City at the FX Collaborative Gallery and LaGuardia Community College.

“The story of New York’s open spaces has national significance because cities everywhere are grappling with the necessity of community engagement in creating high-quality outdoor living space,” said Bloom. “Matthias and I are thrilled that this project is traveling to Chicago.”

The Chicago presentation will include video from a work in progress by the National Public Housing Museum’s current Artist as Instigator, **Natasha Florentino**, whose filmmaking practice involves deep research, community engagement, and a sustained commitment to revealing the power dynamics behind displacement. During the residency, Natasha is producing a film about the fight for public housing that follows residents who oppose the proposed demolition of two public housing developments, the Fulton and Elliott-Chelsea Houses, in the Chelsea neighborhood of Manhattan.

The exhibition will feature in a public talk on Thursday, September 25, 2025 exploring the history of experimental playgrounds and public spaces for families by **Alexandra Lange**, winner of the 2025 Pulitzer Prize for criticism and author of *The Design of Childhood: How the Material World Shapes Independent Kids* and *Meet Me By the Fountain: An Inside History of the Mall*.

At the National Public Housing Museum, visitors are also invited to draw connections between *Living in the Shade* and public art projects installed on the Museum grounds, including the Edgar Miller’s historic WPA sculptures on view in the Alphawood Foundation Sculpture Garden and Marisa Morán Jahn’s play-centered installations *HOOPcycle* and *OOPS*.

Living in the Shade will be displayed in the National Public Housing Museum’s contemporary gallery space. It is presented in alignment with *SHIFT: Architecture in Times of Radical Change*, the sixth edition of the Chicago Architecture Biennial, September 19, 2025 – February 28, 2026.

Support

Living in the Shade is made possible by the Public Housing Community Fund, and sponsored by the LaGuardia and Wagner Archives at LaGuardia Community College; the New York Institute of Technology School of Architecture and Design; Hunter Urban Policy & Planning (UPP), a department within the School of Arts and Sciences at Hunter College; and Studio A+H.

To plan a visit, and for more information, visit www.nphm.org.

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Images Available at National Public Housing Museum [Media Center](#)

ABOUT THE NATIONAL PUBLIC HOUSING MUSEUM

Our story starts with a simple truth: that all people have the right to a home. Founded by public housing residents, the National Public Housing Museum is the first cultural institution dedicated to interpreting the American experience in public housing. Filled with history, memories, music, and art, the Museum is a welcoming community gathering place that honors the stories and

experiences of public housing residents. Through partnerships and programs, the Museum also serves as a civic incubator that inspires visitors to take informed action to advance housing justice. www.nphm.org