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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 (July 16, 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. It features large-scale architectural models, archival and contemporary photographs, renderings, site plans, and community testimonials.

“*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 reimaged 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.”

“Innovative, resident-driven open spaces are and have always been a critical component of NYCHA communities, and *Living in the Shade* gives us a meaningful lens to examine this historical legacy,” said **Alex Zablocki, Executive Director of Public Housing Community Fund**. “As the largest public housing system in the country, NYCHA’s rich history around open space is also an important national narrative, and the National Public Housing Museum is the perfect place for *Living in the Shade*. As an organization that champions meaningful, resident-driven design in NYCHA’s spaces, we are proud to sponsor *Living in the Shade* and are grateful to be working with our partners at the National Public Housing Museum.”

“Quality open spaces on NYCHA campuses are incredibly important to the families we serve and the cultural fabric of New York City,” said **NYCHA Chief Executive Officer Lisa Bova-Hiatt**. “That’s why we’re working to transform not only residents’ homes and buildings, but the grounds, common areas, and campuses as well, through programs like PACT and the Public Housing Preservation Trust. We are incredibly grateful to our partners at the Public Housing Community Fund and the National Public Housing Museum for highlighting the historic importance of NYCHA’s open spaces through the *Living in the Shade* exhibit, which offers a fresh, in-depth perspective on these invaluable community hubs.”

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**, Architect and 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 exhibition 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. Natasha is currently producing a film about the fight for

public housing that follows residents who oppose the proposed demolition of two public housing developments of 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.

About

Living in the Shade was curated by Prof. Matthias Altwicker, AIA LEED AP, New York Institute of Technology and Prof. Nicholas Dagen Bloom, Ph.D., Hunter College.

The exhibition was developed in collaboration with Ariel Lorenzi, Studio A+H, Suzana Rios Sanchez & Fairy Anilkumar Patel, Nadia Bryson & Steven Diaz, NYIT, Brian Polgar and the NYIT FabLab and Artem Pankin, Hunter College.

The National Public Housing Museum presentation was curated by Alex Orfirer Maher and Lisa Yun Lee in collaboration with HOUR Studio and Michael Savona.

Support

Living in the Shade was 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.

Major funding for the exhibition's presentation at the National Public Housing Museum was provided by the Driehaus Foundation, the Public Housing Community Fund, and Grain Collective.



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Visit

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