

# BRONX *Times*

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## Bronx Commons to showcase a music venue

By Robert Christie

Elected officials and community residents broke ground on Friday, January 13 for the new Bronx Commons.

The 426,000 square foot campus will sit on the last of the Melrose Commons parcels and include 305 units of mixed income housing.

However, this project - headed by both the Women's Housing and Economic Development Corporation and BFC Partners, will not just be about housing but also about Bronx culture. The project will include the Bronx Music Hall, an auditorium, that seats 300 people and also serves as an arts-centered community hub.

According to a press release it will be "focused on the deeply-rooted history of cutting edge Bronx music."

"The idea for this came from Bronx residents," said Nancy Biberman, president of WHEDco. "It's really important that everybody know that."

"We've all learned about the history of Bronx music and the generations of different immigrant cultures that have come here and created this fabulous fusion of music," she continued. "The residents of the community have been involved in the design and the planning of the building over these many years."

Mark Naison, professor of African American studies at Fordham University, was an early contributor to the Bronx Music Hall project.

"Fourteen years ago I was tapped on the shoulder by a number of people in the Bronx saying we need to have a project to identify and celebrate Bronx African American history," said Naison at the groundbreaking. "So we began that at Fordham and we began interviewing people who grew up in this neighborho-od."

"One of the things we discovered was that this community produced more varieties of popular music than any place in the world," he continued.

Naison said Biberman eventually brought him into WHEDco to discuss the work he had been doing.

He said the group was able to turn "into brick and mortar" what had originally been an idea to celebrate Bronx music and culture.

The \$11.4 million, 14,000 square foot venue will be designed by interactive-media design firm Local Project.

As for the mixed income housing portion of the project, elected officials were pleased with the addition of new units in the south Bronx.

Councilmember Rafael Salamanca was adamant that the project include residents with varying incomes.

“We need to ensure that everyone in our community is served and has access to these units,” said Salamanca.

The annual household income range for residents at the Bronx Commons is expected to be \$22,032 for a household of three to \$89,760 for a household of three.

“Affordable housing is about more than four walls and a roof – and that is why the innovative, community-based plan for Bronx Commons will have such a powerfully positive impact on local families.” said Don Capoccia, principal at BFC Partners.

In addition, some of the units will be available to people fighting homelessness and families in the shelter system.

Biberman said one of the issues in New York City is that many New Yorkers are getting pushed out of their homes which creates less diversity in neighborhoods.

Bronx Commons is expected to reach completion in 2019.

Some of the financing for the \$165 million project came from state and city agencies, elected officials, JP Morgan Chase, Citibank, and Richman Housing Resources. *Posted 12:00 am, February 27, 2017*

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