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Credit: Public Housing Community Fund

SIT, STAY, CELEBRATE! THE PUBLIC HOUSING COMMUNITY FUND, NYCHA, DESIGN TRUST FOR PUBLIC SPACE, CENTER FOR JUSTICE INNOVATION, AND COUNCIL MAJORITY LEADER AMANDA FARIAS ARE JOINED BY RESIDENTS AND THEIR PUPS TO CUT RIBBON ON A NEW DOG PARK & BBQ AREA AT CASTLE HILL HOUSES

The officials, residents and dogs celebrated the opening of the first dog park housed on NYCHA property

The new space includes an updated BBQ and picnic area, increased access to green space, and maintenance updates to community public spaces to the Bronx public housing campus

THE BRONX, NY (May 19, 2025) – The Public Housing Community Fund (PHCF) and New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA), in partnership with the Design Trust for Public Space, Center for Justice Innovation were joined by Council Majority Leader Amanda Farias, State Senator Nathalia Fernandez, Assemblymember Karines Reyes, local residents and their canine friends to cut the ribbon on the new Castle Hill Houses dog park and community space in The Bronx, marking the first dog park housed on NYCHA property. The festivities included a celebratory ribbon cutting, remarks and residents dogs enjoying the new space, relay races, raffles for dog giveaways, a t-shirt design station, and a community barbecue with burgers and hot dogs.

The Castle Hill Houses space includes the new high-end dog park providing safe access to Castle Hill greenspaces for small and larger dogs along with turf mounds and water access, an updated BBQ and picnic area, increased access and improved green space, and maintenance updates to community public spaces. The project is complemented by 32 doggie waste stations, adorned with community art, and can be found throughout the Castle Hill campus.

The project is a part of the PHCF's Green Space Connections program, a \$3.2 million initiative funded by the Helmsley Charitable Trust that aims to create and activate open spaces at four NYCHA developments across The Bronx and Brooklyn – with an impact on the lives of 14,000 NYCHA residents. Over 800 residents voted on the direction of this project and through hands-on workshops with community engagement experts from the Center for Justice Innovation and guided by landscape designers from Grain Collective, residents collaborated and provided input over a year-long participatory design process and selected/finalized the plans. Today's ribbon cutting marks a significant milestone, as this transformative community space will now be open and provide NYCHA residents and their animal companions a space to commune and socialize with the aim of improving community health.

"The new Castle Hill dog park marks a major milestone for both local residents and the broader Green Space Connections initiative," said **PHCF Executive Director Alex Zablocki**. "This project reflects our commitment to enhancing NYCHA open spaces, amenities, and overall quality of life for NYCHA residents. Green Space Connections empowers communities to shape the design of their own public spaces, and the Castle Hill project is a great example of that. We're deeply grateful to the New York City Housing Authority, the Helmsley Charitable Trust, our program partners, resident leaders, and all stakeholders who made this possible."

"The new community space at Castle Hill Houses will provide residents with the opportunity to engage in so many positive outdoor activities — from barbecuing and picnicking to playing with their canine companions at NYCHA's first-ever dog park," said **NYCHA Chief Executive Officer Lisa Bova-Hiatt**. "We are so excited to cut the ribbon on this amazing renovation just in time for the nice weather ahead, and are so grateful to the Public Housing Community Fund and all of our partners on this project, including the residents of Castle Hill, who provided invaluable input through a year-plus participatory design process that guided the priorities of the project."

"It's an absolute pleasure to cut the ribbon on this amazing new outdoor community space for the furry residents of Castle Hill Houses and their owners," said **NYCHA Chief Operating Officer Eva Trimble**. "Incredible amenities such as NYCHA's first-ever, on-campus dog park, new and improved barbecue and picnic areas, and renovated green space with fresh landscaping will give residents an incredible outlet for outdoor activity and serve as a vital community hub in the summer months to come. We extend our sincere appreciation to our partners at the Public Housing Community Fund, as well as the Helmsley Charitable Trust, for their support and coordination in bringing this space to life."

"This project is a powerful example of what happens when NYCHA residents are not just heard, but empowered to lead," said **Council Majority Leader Amanda Farías**. "From the first design workshop to today's ribbon cutting, this new dog park reflects the creativity, care, and vision of the Castle Hill community. It's more than just a park — it's a meaningful investment in equity, community well-being, and the everyday lives of public housing families in the Bronx."

"We're excited to unveil the new park and community space, giving our residents and their furry friends a wonderful place to enjoy and socialize," said **Jeanette Salcedo, Castle Hill Resident Association President**. "Our residents were deeply involved in the park's design, and it's incredible to see their vision become a reality. This project will bring joy and vibrancy to Castle Hill Houses for many years to come."

"We are barking with excitement to see the Castle Hill Houses residents' vision for a new dog park and lively open space come to life," said **Design Trust for Public Space Executive Director Matthew Clarke**. "From conception to construction, the Green Space Connections initiative centers the needs and perspectives of public housing communities, empowering NYCHA residents — including four-legged ones — to have agency over the design of their neighborhoods."

"There is much to celebrate today: community participation in the design of a new public space; collaboration that bridges the community, nonprofits and government; and the creation of the very first dog park on NYCHA property that will enhance the lives of residents and their canine friends for years to come. Thank you and congratulations to our partner organizations and the hundreds of community members who made this possible, providing us a real-life example of Community Justice in action," said **Courtney Bryan, CEO of the Center for Justice Innovation**.

"The Castle Hill dog park is a prime example of how different groups with a common goal can come together to create a meaningful amenity requested by public housing residents. We can amplify our impact by pooling resources and expertise, even when budgets are limited. Grain Collective was thrilled to work on this groundbreaking project at NYCHA and we congratulate the residents and partners," said **Grain Collective Principal Runit Chhaya**.

“Helmsley’s green space program is focused on increasing public access to green space so New Yorkers can enjoy improved health and quality of life. Bringing more green space to NYCHA campuses has been a big focus of our program. The progress we have seen—from our first grants supporting the Connected Communities participatory process for NYCHA open space renovations in 2017 to seeing residents taking part in the design of their own open spaces in what is now Greenspace Connections—has reaffirmed our commitment to projects that enable New Yorkers to transform the green space in their communities. is incredible. We are so impressed with how the Public Housing Community Fund has brought all the players together to make the residents’ plans to personalize their green space a reality,” said **Tracy Perrizo, Program Officer for Helmsley’s New York City Program.**

"As **NYC Dog Mayor Simon** would put it, whoever doesn't believe in healthy urban greenspaces and improving NYCHA facilities is barking up the wrong tree. And while Simon wouldn't vocally elaborate on his support for NYCHA's initiatives, he is nonetheless a strong proponent of NYCHA's investments in greener, community-based spaces that gives the city's underdogs beautiful places to call home." Mayor Simon abruptly ended his statement to continue chasing a squirrel.

At Castle Hill Houses, Green Space Connections partnered with Grain Collective, a landscape architecture and design firm with experience in community planning with NYCHA to assist with the participatory design process and final designs for the space. Other Green Space Connections projects are located at the Paterson Houses in The Bronx and Marlboro Houses and Roosevelt Houses in Brooklyn. Led by the Public Housing Community Fund, NYCHA's Asset & Capital Management Division, Design Trust for Public Space, and the Neighborhood Safety Initiatives, a program of the Center for Justice Innovation, Green Space Connections is supported by a \$3.2 million grant from The Leona M. and Harry B. Helmsley Charitable Trust.

Access to safe, well-maintained green spaces is essential for health equity. Research shows a strong connection between the availability of open space and the overall health of communities. The Green Space Connections initiative focuses on three core program components: Participatory Design, Physical Transformation, and Sustainability Programming. Together, these phases work to create inclusive, vibrant spaces that directly enhance the health, well-being, resilience, safety, and quality of life for NYCHA residents.

This effort is part of NYCHA's Connected Communities program, which is focused on transforming and modernizing open spaces by implementing public-private partnerships. The program's efforts are based on participatory planning and design, and strive to enhance vibrant, safer and more resilient open spaces in NYCHA communities.

Earlier this year, PHCF and the Design Trust for Public Space released *From Imagine to Activate*, a toolkit to advance community-led design and investments in NYCHA's open spaces at scale. More information on this initiative can be found at <https://www.communityfund.nyc/openspace>. The Castle Hill Houses project is part of a larger movement to engage NYCHA residents through the Connected Communities framework. PHCF is proud to support resident-led open space investments at the following NYCHA developments: Castle Hill, Patterson, Roosevelt, Marlboro, Harborview Terrace, Morrisania Air Rights, Pomonok and Morris I & II Houses.

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About the Public Housing Community Fund

The Public Housing Community Fund is an independent not-for-profit organization that creates and leverages resources and relationships to enhance the opportunities and quality of life for New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) residents and their communities while uplifting the importance of public housing in New York City. www.communityfund.nyc

About the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA)

The New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA), the largest public housing authority in North America, was created in 1934 to provide decent, affordable housing for low- and moderate-income New Yorkers. NYCHA is home to 1 in 17 New Yorkers, providing affordable housing to 520,808 authorized residents through public housing and Permanent Affordability Commitment Together (PACT) programs as well as Section 8 housing. NYCHA has 177,569 apartments in 2,411 buildings across 335 conventional public housing and PACT developments. In addition, NYCHA connects residents to critical programs and services from external and internal partners, with a focus on economic opportunity, youth, seniors, and social services. With a housing stock that spans all five boroughs, NYCHA is a city within a city.

About the Design Trust for Public Space

The [Design Trust for Public Space](http://www.designtrust.org) is a non-profit organization that unlocks the potential of New York's public spaces. Our unique model catalyzes design ideas into action for a more just and equitable city. Founded in 1995 by Andrea Woodner on the tenet that New York City's cultural and democratic life depends on viable public space, today, the Design Trust is a nationally recognized incubator and thought leader that transforms New York City's shared civic spaces—streets, plazas, parks, public buildings, transportation, and housing developments—to create a vibrant, inclusive, and sustainable city.

About the Center for Justice Innovation

The Center for Justice Innovation works with communities and justice systems to advance equity, increase safety, and help individuals and communities thrive. The Center's goal is to identify and resolve as early as possible the challenges that bring people into the criminal and civil legal systems. Since its founding in 1996, the Center has grown to a nationwide organization with more than 800 employees staffing dozens of initiatives in New York, New Jersey, and California, advising practitioners and policymakers across the country and around the world, and conducting research and sharing their expertise with those seeking to transform the justice system. Neighborhood Safety Initiatives, a project of the Center, works to improve quality of life in New York City by investing in residents, transforming public spaces, and influencing policy to address structural racism, local concerns, and enhance public safety, reduce victimization, and promote healing. For more information, visit:

<https://www.innovatingjustice.org/>

About Grain Collective

Grain Collective is a landscape architecture and urban planning practice that builds thriving, equitable communities through inclusive planning, engagement and design. We turn complex urban issues into opportunities by empowering stakeholders to actively shape the places where they belong. For us, successful projects authentically reflect the essence and identity of the communities that give them heart and vibrancy. Our practice areas include:

- Urban Planning: We design systems that make cities more just, sustainable and joyful.
- Landscape Architecture: We weave together places, people and ecologies to create vibrant futures.
- Community Engagement: Local wisdom becomes our superpower for transformative design.

About the Helmsley Charitable Trust

The Leona M. and Harry B. Helmsley Charitable Trust aspires to improve lives by supporting exceptional efforts in the U.S. and around the world in health and select place-based initiatives. Since beginning its active grantmaking in 2008, Helmsley has committed more than \$4.5 billion for a wide range of charitable purposes. Helmsley's New York City Program works to improve the lives of New Yorkers with multiple, chronic health needs. To learn more, visit helmsleytrust.org.