

# Press Release

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## Carmen Villegas Apartments Receives NYSERDA Buildings of Excellence Award

*Award Spotlights Zero Emissions Carbon Multifamily Buildings in New York State*



*Photo Caption: (left to right) Jen Stencel AIA, Associate Principal and Sara Bayer AIA, CPHC, Associate Principal and Director of Sustainability at Magnusson Architecture and Planning PC; Nnenna Lynch, Founder + CEO, Xylem Projects; Fernando Villa, FAIA, NOMA, Principal at Magnusson Architecture and Planning PC; Derek Gaskill, Senior Development Project Manager at Ascendant Neighborhood Development; and Zoe Grossman Beinhorn, ENV SP, Director of Sustainability Services for Bright Power, accepted the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority's (NYSERDA's) Blue Ribbon for Design Excellence on behalf of the CVA project team.*

*Photo Credit: Tom Stock Photography*

**April 5, 2024** – (New York, N.Y.) – Ascendant Neighborhood Development, along with development partners Urban Builders Collaborative, and Xylem Projects, is pleased to announce that Carmen Villegas Apartments (CVA) in East Harlem, N.Y. was recently selected a winner in the fourth round of New York State Energy Research and Development Authority's (NYSERDA's) Buildings of Excellence competition for the design of a zero emission multifamily building. CVA was chosen based on its carbon-neutral performance, financial viability, scalability, and its capacity to foster a healthy and secure living atmosphere for its residents.

This competition supports Governor Kathy Hochul's nation-leading climate goals outlined in the Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act (Climate Act), which place New York state on a path to economy-wide carbon neutrality and mandates an 85% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2050.

"Ascendant's partnerships with NYSEDA have helped us drive forward our mission to not only provide affordable housing but to ensure that these homes are sustainable, energy-efficient, and resilient for the long term," **said Chris Cirillo, Executive Director + President of Ascendant.** "NYSEDA's support has been instrumental in integrating cutting-edge energy solutions into our Developments, significantly reducing our carbon footprint while enhancing the living conditions for our residents." **Nnenna Lynch, Founder + CEO of Xylem Projects added,** "We appreciate NYSEDA's leadership and partnership to help us actualize this project, a leading example of sustainability." **Fernando Villa, FAIA, NOMA, LEED AP BD+C Principal, Magnusson Architecture and Planning enthused,** "We are thrilled for this development and this team, as the Buildings of Excellence program is key to realizing CVA's inspired sustainability goals. With Early Design Support funding and now a project award, we've been able to work closely with the developers, builders and consultants to ensure a fully integrated and well-informed design process. It is an incredible team effort, and we are so proud to be part of it."

Carmen Villegas Apartments (CVA), a new, 28-story, mixed-use development will offer 211 affordable senior apartments, ground floor retail and a community facility space for LGBTQ+ seniors in the East Harlem neighborhood of Manhattan. Named for prominent local activist, the late Carmen Villegas, CVA will be a high-profile testament to the vibrancy of the neighborhood, and an enduring space of support for those who have spurred the area's vitality for so long. Situated adjacent to CVA is Casita Park, an existing elderly housing residence owned by Ascendant. Ascendant's overarching vision entails a unified design approach for both buildings, with shared entryways, communal spaces, and amenities to enhance cohesion and connectivity within the community.

The project represents a new development endeavor in East Harlem spearheaded by a collaborative effort among three locally-rooted organizations —Ascendant Neighborhood Development, Urban Builders Collaborative (UBC), and Xylem Projects. Leading the design process is Magnusson Architecture and Planning, PC (MAP), a New York-based firm known for its commitment to sustainability, equity, and community-driven values. Their design work includes Passive House and near net zero energy buildings, as well as leading edge energy

efficiency technologies and measurements of embodied carbon. Overseeing construction, Lettire Construction is an affiliate of co-developers UBC and has served the East Harlem Community since 1979. Lettire has made significant contributions to the redevelopment of the neighborhood, maintaining a strong presence, creating local jobs and promoting business opportunities with local subcontractors and vendors. Complementing this partnership are MEP engineers from Skyline Engineering, sustainability and energy consultants from Bright Power.

Along with Phius (Passive House Institute US) certification, CVA will also certify through Enterprise Green Communities (EGC) 2020 and ENERGY STAR Multifamily New Construction (ESMFNC). It will feature ground source heat pumps, cooling and domestic hot water; a rooftop solar array as well as Building Integrated Photovoltaic (BIPV) facade cladding for more on-site energy generation; central ERVs to provide filtered fresh air and exhaust for apartments and corridors; a super insulated envelope eliminating thermal bridging, airtight construction and high-performance glazing to meet the Passive House requirements for this climate as well as the high OITC requirements for this train-adjacent site.

### **About Ascendant Neighborhood Development**

Ascendant's current 690-unit portfolio comprises 28 buildings ranging in size from four to 94 apartments, featuring a mix of newly constructed and rehabilitated structures. Ascendant's ongoing collaborations with NYSERDA have been instrumental in integrating cutting-edge energy solutions into their developments, with initiatives such as the Energy Master Plan and participation in the RetrofitNY Pledge. Looking ahead, the organization's development pipeline is robust, with plans to add 2,146 additional apartments, including 600 in new construction projects and over 1,500 through rehabilitation of existing buildings. These projects, slated to start construction in 2024 and 2025, represent Ascendant's ongoing commitment to expanding affordable housing options across Northern Manhattan in alignment with NYSERDA's objectives for sustainable development.

### **About Urban Builders Collaborative**

Urban Builders Collaborative (UBC) has successfully developed ~2,000 multifamily residential apartments with costs over \$1 billion throughout New York City, New Jersey and Westchester County. UBC is uniquely positioned to leverage the resources of Lettire's 45+ years of experience providing value engineering at the project's inception. UBC is flexible in structuring joint ventures with established and emerging developers to leverage their strengths to create transformative projects. UBC targets projects that involve public private partnerships and joint ventures providing balance sheet strength and experience in large-scale construction complexity. UBC and Lettire have been at the forefront of sustainability and implementing NYSERDA's initiatives as the builder of Via Verde over a decade ago and most recently as the co-developer and builder of Chestnut Commons, a certified Passive House.

### **About Xylem Projects**

Xylem Projects is a mission-driven real estate development and investment firm dedicated to preserving housing and creating high-impact mixed-use projects that enable people and

neighborhoods to prosper. Guided by the four pillars of community enrichment, design, sustainability, and innovation, Xylem is MWBE certified in NYC, NYS and NJ.

The Buildings of Excellence Competition, launched in March 2019, is a \$58 million initiative that has awarded 65 exemplary multifamily new construction demonstration projects to date. Within the initiative, \$2 million in Early Design Support funding has been awarded to architecture and design firms to enhance capabilities to design toward carbon neutral standards. It is the only competition of its kind, with the awarded projects becoming part of a comprehensive data collection effort that will help determine how to cost-effectively deliver superior performing buildings that will serve as an essential building block of a carbon-neutral future and advance the design and construction of multifamily buildings. The Competition is administered by NYSERDA with the support of an advisory council comprising a cross-section of experts from the design, real estate and sustainability sectors with partners including American Institute of Architects New York State, ASHRAE and The Real Estate Board of New York.

For a complete list of the winning projects statewide, please visit NYSERDA's Buildings of Excellence website at: [www.nyserda.ny.gov/boe](http://www.nyserda.ny.gov/boe).

Carmen Villegas Apartments was selected under Round Four for its zero-emissions performance, profitability, ability to be adopted broadly, and for creating a healthy and safe living environment.

**NYSERDA President and CEO, Doreen M. Harris said,** "Passive House and other high-performance standards contribute to the long-term economic stability and overall affordability of properties, better living conditions for tenants, and cleaner communities overall. We're proud to have selected projects like Carmen Villegas Apartments in this fourth round of the Buildings of Excellence Competition as the project team plans to bring a new energy-efficient living experience to its occupants while demonstrating climate-friendly building design and construction."

This project will also provide comprehensive data on design, construction and cost that can be analyzed and shared to increase the number of carbon neutral buildings in New York State. For a complete list of the winning projects statewide, please visit NYSERDA's Buildings of Excellence website at <https://www.nyserda.ny.gov/all-programs/programs/multifamily-buildings-of-excellence>.

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