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Tenant Inquilino

Housing for people, not profit

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Metropolitan Council on Housing
339 Lafayette St.
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PERIODICAL

'RUDY GIULIANI'S BANDITS' Rent Guidelines Board Votes 4%-6% Increases, But Nixes Poor Tax

By Steven Wishnia

Despite angry disruptions by tenants chanting "No Rent Hike" and "Evict the RGB," the city Rent Guidelines Board voted June 20 to allow increases of up to 6% on rent-stabilized apartments.

The guidelines, 4% for a one-year lease renewal and 6% for two years, affect about 1 million apartments in the city. The RGB had proposed slightly lower increases, 3% and 5%, at a preliminary vote in May, but tenant groups strongly suspect that Mayor Rudolph Giuliani demanded that it give landlords more money. Giuliani, who has a history of dictating guidelines to the nine-member board, replaced three of its ostensibly neutral "public members" in late April.

The board passed the increases 7-2 with no debate. The only dissenters were Jeffrey Coleman and David Pagan, the two tenant representatives.

Tenant groups, who were demanding a two-year rent freeze, won one victory. The RGB voted 5-4 against the "poor tax," a \$15-a-month surcharge on apartments renting for less than \$500, and rejected a minimum rent. The board had imposed some form of the poor tax every year since Giuliani took office.

Surprisingly, new public member Mort Starobin cast the deciding vote, joined by Coleman, Pagan, and public members Agustin Rivera and Bartholomew Carmody. Starobin had earlier proposed the 3% and 5% preliminary guidelines with the poor tax, but abstained—to much laughter from tenants in the crowd—when the other board members voted against it unanimously.

Coleman called the poor tax a "moral abomination,"

noting that "the fastest-growing segment of New York's homeless population is homeless families." As the meeting closed, landlord representative Vincent Castellano—who obviously relishes confrontation with tenants—tried to reopen the issue, arguing that "there is no data supporting that there are poor people in these apartments." That attempt—which also included a \$215 minimum rent—lost by the same 5-4 margin.

The board also voted a 2% increase on hotels, with the tenant representatives dissenting and the landlord members abstaining, and 1% and 2% increases for lofts. For vacant apartments moving out of rent control, they approved Starobin's proposal to raise rents to 150% of the Maximum Base



STEVEN WISHNIA

Protesters outside the RGB meeting.

Rent or to the federal fair-market standard plus an "energy adjustment," whichever is greater. Coleman called it "a dangerous, pernicious vote," but only Rivera joined him and Pagan in dissent.

The protests—about 150 people attended the

meeting, at Cooper Union in Manhattan—were the loudest at an RGB vote since the state government gutted rent regulations in 1997, allowing landlords to raise rents on vacant apartments by 20%.

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Jane Wood, 94 & Still Fighting for Tenants' Rights

By Gloria Sukenick

Street theater, or in this case, lobby theater, was the vehicle chosen by Jane Wood of the Chelsea Housing Coalition to protest the tactics of her landlord, Mark Scharfman. Scharfman is in the process of renovating the building at 274 West 19th St. where Wood has lived for many years.

As we all know, being a longtime resident of a building doesn't make you a favorite of any landlord these days. And, if in the process of renovating, it is possible to make the life of any long-term tenant a misery, well, that's all to the good. After all, these tenants are those most likely to have the protection of rent stabilization or rent-control regula-

tions, and that makes raising the rents to the skies in those apartments more difficult for landlords.

So when the elevator replacement began weeks ago, it was more than an inconvenience for the many senior citizens living in the six-story building. In effect, they had become prisoners in their apartments. Jane, who was hurt in a taxi accident, has been using two canes and the stairs to get in and out of her fourth-floor apartment. There are other frail occupants of the building whose lives have been seriously altered by the elevator replacement.

Jane Wood, longtime tenant advocate, was not about to take this lying

down. Or maybe you could say she was going to take this lying down—on a mattress in the lobby of her building. She was dressed in a nightgown and nightcap, to graphically illustrate the fact that she may not be able to reach her own bedroom until the elevator is replaced.

She was surrounded by longtime friends, admirers, and housing activists from Met Council on Housing, Housing Conservation Coordinators and the Association for Neighborhood and Housing Development. Councilmember Christine Quinn, State Senator Tom Duane and aides representing Rep. Jerrold Nadler, City Comptroller Alan Hevesi,

and Assemblymember Dick Gottfried were also present.

According to Bob Kalin of Housing Conservation Coordinators, Scharfman owns some 40-odd buildings in Hell's Kitchen and is not beloved by his tenants. A tenant who lives in another Scharfman build-

ing in Chelsea said the landlord has been turning apartments over and giving new tenants month-to-month tenancy instead of the rent-stabilized leases required by law. Kalin also revealed that Scharfman has been the

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Met Council Endorses Steve DiBrienza for Public Advocate, Marty Markowitz for Brooklyn BP, Steve Banks for Council in Sept. 11 Democratic Primary

by Kenny Schaeffer

Met Council enthusiastically endorses **Stephen DiBrienza for New York City Public Advocate**. DiBrienza, head of the City Council's general welfare committee, has earned tenant support by speaking out forcefully and frequently on a wide range of issues of critical importance in the fight to preserve and expand affordable housing. He has opposed the Rent Guidelines Board's poor tax; called for a rent freeze; demanded the repeal of the Rockefeller "Urstadt" law that deprives New York City of home rule over rent regulation; and called for the repeal of \$2,000 vacancy decontrol and high-income decontrol, the wedges created by pro-landlord politicians like George Pataki, Joe Bruno and Peter Vallone to undermine rent and eviction protections. As chair

of the Council's welfare committee, DiBrienza has also led the resistance to the cruel policies of Mayor Giuliani and Human Resources Administration Commissioner Jason Turner to throw hundreds of thousands of needy families off the welfare rolls. Time and again, using the Council's rarely invoked subpoena power, DiBrienza has forced Turner and his aides to admit the hollowness of Giuliani administration claims, for example that those denied public assistance have found jobs that brought them out of poverty. DiBrienza has also worked to creating meaningful, well-paying jobs for low-income New Yorkers, and to expand the "living wage" law for those doing business with the city. As public advocate, Steve DiBrienza can continue his strong advocacy for low, moderate and middle-income tenants in New York City, improved public education, and a government that is on the side of working families. Tenants are encouraged to volunteer for Steve DiBrienza's campaign by calling (212) 964-8260.

Met Council endorses **State Senator Marty Markowitz for Brooklyn Borough President**. Markowitz, founder of the Flatbush Tenants Council in the 1970s, has remained an active and effective champion for tenants'

rights and affordable housing. His eloquent testimony at last year's RGB hearing, that he had to spend 60% of his relatively large salary as a state legislator to find a decent two-bedroom apartment to raise a family when he recently got married, brought home the fact that New York's worsening housing-affordability crisis has hit the middle class, and is no longer only a concern for poorer New Yorkers. Marty Markowitz's campaign number is (718) 332-7171.

As previously noted in these pages, **Met Council also endorses Steve Banks for City Council** in Brooklyn's 39th District, which includes the neigh-

borhoods of Cobble Hill, Carroll Gardens, Park Slope, Windsor Terrace, Kensington and Borough Park. Banks has been a community activist and fighter for housing and tenants' rights for over 20 years, most recently as head of the Legal Aid Society's Homeless Families Rights Project. Steve Banks has developed expertise working closely with the Council as an advocate on both policy and budget issues, and is exactly the kind of new leadership needed as a response to the term-limits law. To volunteer for Steve Banks' campaign, call (718) 972-9736.

Complaint Numbers

The Department of Housing, Preservation and Development (HPD) has changed its Central Complaints hotline. The new number is: (212) 824-4328

The Department of Buildings has also condensed its borough phone numbers into one complaints line. The new number is: (212) 227-7000

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Met Council wants to profile you and your neighbors' struggle to obtain affordable quality housing. We want you to write for *Tenant/Inquilino*.

For more information call Met Council 212-979-6238

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Our phones are ringing of the hook! Met Council is looking for people to counsel tenants on our hotline. We will train you! The hotline runs on Mondays and Wednesdays from 1:30-5 PM. If you can give one afternoon a week for this crucial service to the tenant community, call Dave at (212) 979-6238 x6.



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Scott Sommer hosts Met Council's

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- Weekly Housing Court Decision summaries

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EL INQUILINO HISPANO

‘Los Bandidos de Rudy Giuliani’

Junta de Regulación de Renta aprueba incrementos de 4 y 6 por ciento, pero dice ‘no’ al ‘impuesto de pobres’

Por Steven Wishnia

Traducido por Lightning Translations

A pesar de interrupciones de inquilinos enfurecidos coreando, “No a la alza de rentas” y “Que se desaloje a la RGB,” la Junta de Regulación de Renta (RGB, por sus siglas en inglés) votó el 20 de junio para permitir incrementos de hasta 6 por ciento en apartamentos de renta estabilizada.

Las regulaciones son de 4 por ciento para la renovación del contrato de arrendamiento por un año

y 6 por ciento por dos años, afectando a cerca de un millón de apartamentos en la ciudad. La RGB había propuesto incrementos ligeramente menores, 3 y 5 por ciento respectivamente, en una votación preliminar en mayo, pero los grupos de inquilinos sospechan que el alcalde Rudolph Giuliani ordenó a la junta dar más dinero a los caseros. Giuliani, quien cuenta con antecedentes de dictaminar regulacio-

nes a la junta de nueve miembros, reemplazó a fines de abril a tres de los supuestamente neutrales miembros públicos.

La junta aprobó los incrementos con una votación de 7 a 2 sin ningún debate. La única oposición fue de Jeffrey Coleman y David Pagan, los dos representantes de los inquilinos.

Los grupos de inquilinos, que demandaban una congelación de rentas por dos años, ganaron una batalla.

La RGB votó 5 a 4 en contra del “impuesto de pobres,” un sobrecargo de \$15 al mes en apartamentos que se rentan por menos de \$500, y rechazó una renta mínima. La junta ha impuesto cierto tipo de impuesto de pobres todos los años desde que Giuliani subió al poder.

Sorprendentemente, el nuevo miembro público Mort Starobin sufragó el voto decisivo junto con Coleman, Pagan y los

miembros públicos Agustín Rivera y Bartholomew Carmody. Starobin había propuesto anteriormente las regulaciones preliminares del 3 y 5 por ciento más el impuesto de pobres, pero se abstuvo, entre las risas de los inquilinos en la multitud, cuando los otros miembros de la junta votaron en contra de forma unánime.

Coleman llamó al im-

pasa a la página 4

Los Ajustes de la “Junta de Regulación de Renta” de la Ciudad de Nueva York (Orden No. 32)

Para los contratos de apartamentos de Renta Estabilizada que comienzan el 1ro. de octubre de 2000 hasta el 30 de septiembre de 2001, incluyendo las concesiones de Pataki adoptadas por la Legislatura Estatal el 19 de junio de 1997

Los topes de renta que aparecen en el cuadro son los incrementos máximos que los dueños de edificios pueden cobrar legalmente por los apartamentos de renta estabilizada en la ciudad de Nueva York. Son válidos para todos los contratos que comienzan dentro del período de doce meses a partir del 1ro. de octubre de 2000. Los incrementos de alquiler basados en las pautas para la renovación del contrato de 1 o 2 años pueden cobrarse solamente una vez durante el período cubierto por dichas pautas, y deben ser aplicados a la renta legal estabilizada para el 30 de septiembre de 2000. Las cantidades que aparecen en el cuadro y los incrementos para los apartamentos vacíos no se aplican a los apartamentos que estaban sujetos a renta controlada en aquella fecha.

Los Contratos para Apartamentos Vacíos o Nuevos En junio de 1997, el gobernador George Pataki, al intentar destruir la regulación de rentas, forzó cambios que les dieron a los caseros una sobrepaga muy grande por los apartamentos vacíos. Una cláusula de la “Reforma al Acta de Regulación de Renta” de 1997 permite que los nuevos alquileres sean incrementados en un porcentaje obligatorio: 20% para un contrato de dos años, y por un contrato de 1 año, 20% de incremento menos la diferencia en el tope de renovación para los contratos de 1 y 2 años. La nueva ley permite también incrementos adicionales para los apartamentos vacíos donde no se habían cobrado incrementos por desocupación por ocho años o más.

Sobrecargos de Renta Los inquilinos deben estar al tanto de que muchos caseros van a aprovecharse de la complejidad de estas regulaciones y subvenciones, así como del poco conocimiento de los inquilinos del historial de renta de sus apartamentos, para cobrar un alquiler ilegal. Una vez que el

inquilino haya tomado posesión del apartamento, puede escoger entre llenar un formulario de queja de sobrecargo de renta con la oficina de la División de Vivienda y Renovación Comunal (DHCR), o disputar la cantidad de la renta en la corte de vivienda de la ciudad para que se determine cuál es el alquiler legal.

Si un posible inquilino da muestras de conocer sus derechos, lo más probable es que el casero no firmará ningún contrato con tal inquilino. Los caseros evitan contratar con inquilinos que les pueden dar problemas. El sobrecargo de alquiler es muy común. Todos los inquilinos deben luchar contra posibles sobrecargos. Obtenga y llene un formulario *Form RA-89* con la oficina de DHCR para determinar el alquiler correcto en los archivos oficiales. Llame a la DHCR a (718) 739-6400 para obtener un formulario.

La Apelación de la Renta de Mercado Justa Otro tipo de sobrecargo ocurre frecuentemente cuando se vacía un apartamento que previamente estaba sujeto a renta controlada y se alquila con renta estabilizada. La Junta de Regulación de Renta (RGB) es-

tablece anualmente lo que ellos llaman el “Tope Especial de la Renta de Mercado Justa,” el cual es empleado por la DHCR para bajar las rentas de mercado injustas de los inquilinos que llenan el formulario llamado “Apelación a la Renta Justa de Mercado” (FMRA). Según la Orden 32, es la Renta de Mercado Justa de HUD o un 150% sobre la renta base máxima. Ningún inquilino de un apartamento de renta estabilizada que fue descontrolado el 1ro de abril de 1984 o después debe dejar de poner a prueba la llamada “Renta Legal Inicial Regulada” (renta de mercado) que los caseros cobran cuando hay descontrol del apartamento. Use el formulario de DHCR *Form RA-89*. Indique claramente que su queja es tanto una queja de “Apelación a la Renta Justa de Mercado” como de “sobrecargo.” La corte de vivienda no puede tomar decisión sobre una Apelación de Renta de Mercado. Apartamentos vacíos que antes estaban controlados en edificios que se han convertido en cooperativas o condominios no se vuelven estabilizados y no satisfacen los requisitos para la Apelación de la Renta Justa de Mercado.

Exención de Incrementos para las Personas de Mayor Edad: Las personas de 62 años o más que viven en apartamentos estabilizados y cuyos ingresos familiares anuales son de \$20,000 o menos, y que pagan (o enfrentan un incremento de alquiler que los forzaría a pagar) una renta de un tercio o más de sus ingresos, pueden tener derecho al programa de Exención de Incrementos para las Personas de Mayor Edad (SCRIE, por sus siglas en inglés), si aplican al Departamento de la Ciudad de Nueva York Sobre las Personas de Mayor Edad, cuya dirección es: SCRIE Unit, 2 Lafayette Street, NY, NY 10007. Si el alquiler actual de un inquilino que tiene derecho a este programa sobrepasa un tercio del ingreso, no se lo puede reducir, pero es posible evitar incrementos de alquiler en el futuro. Obtenga el formulario de SCRIE por llamar al (212) 442-1000.

Unidades de Desván (Lofts) Los incrementos legales sobre la renta base para las unidades de desván son de un 3 por ciento por un contrato de un año y un 5 por ciento por un contrato de dos años. No se permiten in-

crementos para las unidades de desván vacías.

Hoteles y Apartamentos de una Sola Habitación Lo establecido es un 2% para los apartamentos de hotel de Clase A, casas de habitaciones, hoteles de clase B (de 30 habitaciones o más), hoteles de una sola habitación, y las casas de habitaciones (Clase B, 6-29 cuartos), sobre la renta legal que se pagaba el 30 de septiembre de 2000. No se permiten incrementos para apartamentos vacíos. Lo incremento estipulado no se puede cobrar a menos que un 70 por ciento de las unidades en el edificio sean ocupadas por inquilinos permanentes de renta estabilizada o controlada, pagando rentas reguladas legales. Además, no se permiten incrementos si el casero ha omitido de darle al nuevo ocupante una copia de los Derechos y Responsabilidades de los Dueños e Inquilinos de Hoteles.

La Desregulación de Rentas Altas y Altos Ingresos (1) Los apartamentos que legalmente se alquilan por \$2,000 o más por mes y que se desocuparon entre el 7 de julio de 1993 y el 1ro. de octubre de 1993, o en o desde del 1ro de abril de 1994 son sujetos a la desregulación. (2) La misma desregulación se les aplica, para el mismo período establecido en (1), a los apartamentos que legalmente pagan \$2,000 o más mensualmente aunque no se desocupen, si el ingreso total de la familia es más de \$175,000 en los dos años consecutivos previos. Para cumplir los requisitos de esta segunda forma de desregulación, el casero tiene que enviarle un formulario de certificación de ingreso al inquilino entre el 1ro de enero y el 1ro de mayo, así como someter dicho formulario al DHCR y conseguir su aprobación.



Tipo de Contrato	Renta Legal Actual	Contrato de 1 Año	Contrato de 2 Años	
Renovación del Contrato	Más de \$500	4%	6%	
	\$500 o menos (Alquileres de \$215 o menos se alzan a \$215 después de aplicarse los aumentos)	4% + \$15	6% + \$15	
Contratos para Apartamentos Vacíos	Más de \$500	Incrementos por desocupación cobrados en los últimos 8 años	18%	20%
		Incrementos por desocupación no cobrados en los últimos 8 años	0.6% por el número de años desde el último incremento por estar vacío, más el 18%	0.6% por el número de años desde el último incremento por estar vacío, más el 20%
	Menos de \$300	Incrementos por desocupación cobrados en los últimos 8 años	18% + \$100	20% + \$100
		Incrementos por desocupación no cobrados en los últimos 8 años	0.6% por el número de años desde el último incremento por estar vacío, + 18% + \$100	0.6% por el número de años desde el último incremento por estar vacío, + 20% + \$100
	Renta de \$300 a \$500	Incrementos por desocupación cobrados en los últimos 8 años	18% o \$100, lo que sea mayor	20% o \$100, lo que sea mayor
		Incrementos por desocupación no cobrados en los últimos 8 años	0.6% por el número de años desde el último incremento por estar vacío, mas 18%, o \$100, lo que sea mayor	0.6% por el número de años desde el último incremento por estar vacío, mas 20%, o \$100, lo que sea mayor

Los Bandidos

viene de la página 3

puesto de pobres una “abominación moral,” notando que “el segmento que más rápido crece entre la población de desamparados de Nueva York son las familias desamparadas.” Al final de la reunión, el representante de los caseros Vincent Castellano, quien obviamente disfruta los conflictos con inquilinos, trató de reabrir el tema, argumentando que “no hay datos que respaldan la información de que vive gente pobre en estos apartamentos.” Ese intento, que también incluía una renta mínima de \$215, perdió por el mismo margen de 5 a 4.

La junta también aprobó un incremento de 2 por ciento en hoteles con la oposición de los representantes de los inquilinos y la abstención de los miembros representantes de los caseros, e incrementos de 1 y 2 por ciento para desvanes. Para apartamentos vacantes que dejan de estar de renta controlada, aprobaron la propuesta de Starobin para elevar las rentas a 150 por ciento de la renta base máxima o al nivel federal de mercado justo más un “ajuste de energía,” lo que sea mayor. Coleman llamó a esto “un voto peligroso y pernicioso,” pero sólo Rivera y Pagan se unieron a él en oposición.

Cerca de 150 personas asistieron a la reunión en Cooper Union

en Manhattan, y las protestas fueron las más ruidosas en una votación de la RGB desde que el gobierno estatal debilitó las regulaciones de rentas en 1997, permitiendo a los caseros a elevar rentas en apartamentos vacantes un 20 por ciento. El nuevo presidente de la junta, Steven Sinacori, golpeó su martillo sin resultados mientras los inquilinos coreaban “¡Codicia! ¡Codicia! ¡Codicia!”

“Estamos hartos de hablar y ustedes no nos responden,” gritó Rochelle Thompson de Harlem.

“¿Cuántas veces tienen que esconder la cara cuando ven a alguien viviendo en la calle?” gritó a la junta Genen Reyes, poeta del Loisaida. “¿No ven cuánto daño han ocasionado a la ciudad?” La junta tuvo varios recesos debido a los gritos y coros de la gente. Durante un receso, los protestantes se tomaron de los brazos y cantaron “Congelaremos nuestras rentas” al tono de la canción “Triunfaremos.”

Lee Holman, un periodista técnico de Yorkville, fue una de las cuatro personas que hicieron plantón sentándose en el suelo frente a la junta, así como el organizador del Met Council Dave Powell y la activista de Harlem Nellie Bailey. La policía les pidió que se retiraran, pero no los arrestaron cuando se rehusaron a le-

vantarse. “He estado observando cómo se descuida mi casa durante años y ya estoy cansado,” afirmó Holman. El está pagando más de \$1,100 de renta y maldijo varias veces mientras calculaba cuánto significaría un incremento de 6 por ciento.

Los grupos de inquilinos han estado pidiendo una congelación de rentas durante los últimos dos años. De acuerdo a información de la RGB, el ingreso neto de operaciones de los caseros se ha incrementado en promedio de 10 por ciento cada año desde que entró en vigencia la ley en 1997, aun tomando en cuenta los tan comentados incrementos del costo de combustible en los últimos dos años, mientras los ingresos de los inquilinos se han estancado o han disminuido. “Tenemos clara evidencia de que el lucro de los caseros es el más alto de todos los tiempos,” dijo Coleman a la junta a principios de la tarde. Pero la junta rechazó 7 a 2 su propuesta para evitar el incremento.

Una “fuente interna” contó al Met Council el día de la votación que el alcalde Giuliani había ordenado los incrementos de 4 y 6 por ciento. Pagan dice que él no sabía, que los miembros públicos “no se reúnen conmigo.” Sin embargo, cuando el ex presidente de la RGB nombrado por Giuliani, Edward Hochman (un “libertario” que se opone al control de rentas aunque

comentó a *Tenant/Inquilino* en junio que la revocación total de regulaciones “causaría motines”) renunció o fue despedido en abril, se quejó de haber tenido que recibir órdenes del alcalde. Los miembros públicos elegidos por Giuliani generalmente han sido acaudalados blancos que aprueban incrementos de renta sin una palabra de debate, ni siquiera algunos lugares comunes sobre la necesidad de nivelar los intereses de los caseros y los inquilinos.

Esto, tanto como las rentas por las nubes, es lo que enoja a los inquilinos: el sentido de que el fraude está hecho, que aquellos responsables de administrar el sistema ni siquiera ponen la más mínima atención a sus problemas. “Hice mi trabajo,” Hochman dijo. Pero bajo Giuliani el trabajo de la RGB ha sido elevar rentas tanto como sea posible sin dañar las perspectivas políticas del alcalde (esto no quiere decir que le queden muchas hoy en día).

“Yo veo así al futuro,” dijo Lismar Leon, de 14 años de edad y miembro de un grupo de jóvenes traídos a la reunión por el grupo del Loisaida Good Old Lower East Side (GOLES). “Ustedes nos verán a los adolescentes viviendo en la calle, porque los apartamentos cuestan mil dólares al mes. ¿En qué tipo de trabajo nos van a pagar tanto dinero?”

Fort Greene Community Speaks Out

By Ann Schneider and Valerie Joyner

Nearly 200 people crowded the pews in the historic Lafayette Avenue Presbyterian Church in June, looking very much like the people in the 1976 mural decorating the walls of the sanctuary, which depicts the Fort Greene neighborhood's diversity.

Billed as a “community speak-out” by the group that organized it, six-month old Fort Greene Together, residents were invited to address the causes of the gentrification that is so apparent as one walks along lower Fulton Street. Scores of new restaurants have opened on DeKalb Avenue near Fort Greene Park. The complexion of the neighborhood has become much lighter, as financial-industry couples find their money can buy more in Brooklyn than in Manhattan. One brownstone was recently sold for \$1 million, and Coreoran Realtors opened an office in March to capitalize on the inflated housing market.

Longtime residents are concerned about plans by the Brooklyn Academy of Music Local Development Corporation (BAM LDC) to create a 14-block “cultural district” bordered by DeKalb and Flatbush avenues, Hanson Place and Ashland Place. While no written development plan has yet been made public, BAM LDC, chaired by Harvey Lichtenstein, former director of BAM, the musical institution, has said it will spend \$560 million over the next

10 years to build new performance spaces, offices and residents for artists, plus retail space, gallery space and a boutique hotel. Another proposal among many competing visions privately expressed by BAM LDC is for a New Jersey Performing Arts Center-style pavilion, which would mean much greater displacement of current residents and merchants.

Residents' concerns are fueled by the fact that BAM LDC has not to this date, held a public meeting about its plans, but instead insisted that three invitation-only forums held in January and June constituted dialogue with the community.

BAM LDC extended the borders of its cultural district to include the African-identified merchants on Fulton Street stretching down to South Oxford Place, where some displacement of merchants has already occurred. Jonathan Adewumi's store, Nigerian Fabrics and Fashions, was priced off Fulton Street in April after a 60% increase in rent on his storefront. He has relocated to Myrtle Avenue, with the help of the Pratt Area Community Council. Adewumi, who blames the January announcement of the creation of the BAM LDC for the rent increase, is president of Bogolan Merchants Association, a group of businesses clustered around Fulton Street that takes its name from bogolanfini, the mud-dyed cloth made in Mali.

BAM LDC has said it is “in dia-

logue with” about 90 artists' organizations, some of whom will be the lucky beneficiaries of new office and performance space. Their estimates of the number of these groups who are presently based in Brooklyn have wavered from “about 35%” to “about half,” leading Assemblymember Roger Green (D-Brooklyn) to rename the project the “Manhattan Displacement District for Racial and Cultural Exclusion.” Green was instrumental in forcing BAM LDC to provide space for the Bogolan Merchants Association as part of its plan.

Bruce Ratner, chair of BAM's Board of Directors and a member of the BAM LDC board, is the president and principal owner of Forest City Ratner Companies, which built the nearby MetroTech and Atlantic Center office and retail complexes. Ratner controls development rights to the two parking lots slated for new construction by BAM LDC, and is about to build a second shopping mall at Atlantic Terminal, above the Long Island Railroad train station. This new mall, unrelated to BAM LDC, has already leased 80% of the yet-to-be built space to retailers like the Gap, Target, Victoria's Secret and the Children's Place.

BAM LDC has proposed to include 20% subsidized housing in the plan along with market-rate new units, likely to cost \$2,500 per month in rent. Many of the African-American poets, artists

and writers who make Fort Greene their home live on less than \$20,000 per year and cannot afford to pay more than \$500 per month in rent. The poverty rate for Fort Greene as a whole is 31% outside of the three public-housing projects, Lafayette, Farragut, and Whitman Houses. Within those projects, the poverty rate is 46%.

Meanwhile, Realty on the Greene, a real-estate firm owned by Kathryn Lilly, has been raising rents of property it manages to \$2,400 per month from \$1,400 per month. Lilly, who owns her building, just evicted a 91-year old Guatemalan woman and her daughter, who had lived in the building for 23 years. A community campaign to dissuade her from proceeding with the eviction was unsuccessful. Most of the housing stock in Fort Greene is exempt from rent regulations, because it primarily consists of two- to five-family houses. The state's 1971 Urstadt Law bars the city from extending rent regulations to cover those buildings.

One idea is for Fort Greene Together to lobby the City Council to call upon Albany to repeal Urstadt. Another is to borrow tactics from the neighboring Fifth Avenue Committee, which has created an “anti-displacement zone” in Park Slope to bring pressure to bear on the realtors it sees as most responsible for driving up housing prices.

The Housing First! Challenge: Pro

By Patrick Markee

By any standard, New York City has an acute and growing housing crisis. Every night, 27,000 homeless children and adults crowd municipal shelters, the largest homeless-shelter population since the 1980s. For the New Yorkers who make the city thrive—the teachers, firefighters, senior citizens, municipal employees, office workers, and thousands of others—the steep cost of decent housing overwhelms household budgets, causes many to consider leaving the city, and leads to illegal and unsafe overcrowding in too many buildings and neighborhoods.

Despite the severity of the current housing crisis, New York City has a long tradition of successful public investment in its housing infrastructure. In the three decades following World War II, the Mitchell-Lama program

produced more than 125,000 housing units for city's rapidly growing population. Smart housing investments helped the city fight its way out of the devastating period of property abandonment and arson fires during the 1970s and 1980s. Indeed, forward-thinking investments in affordable and supportive housing actually reduced homelessness in New York City at the onset of the 1990s. However, dramatic cutbacks in housing investments by Mayor Rudolph Giuliani's administration over the past several years have resulted in rising homelessness—particularly among children and families—and a growing shortage of affordable apartments.

Simply put, the production of decent affordable housing is not keeping pace with New York City's growth. As Coalition for the Homeless documented in

its July 2000 report, "Housing a Growing City: New York's Bust in Boom Times," the city faces a widening affordable-housing gap. Consider the following facts:

- In the last decade, the city added 456,000 residents, while creating only 85,000 new housing units.
- One of every four city renter households pays more than half of its income for rent.
- The city lost more than half a million affordable apartments (i.e., those renting for under \$500 per month) over the last decade.

With the city's government due to change dramatically over the next year—term limits are driving elections for a new mayor, public advocate, comptroller, and at least 35 of the 51 members of the City Council—a new campaign has emerged to promote an ambitious plan to

address the city's housing crisis.

Housing First! is an unprecedented alliance of more than 150 organizations, including civic groups, advocacy organizations, religious clergy, housing advocates, major financial institutions, not-for-profit organizations, real-estate groups, business leaders, and organized labor. Committed to having a voice well past the elections, Housing First! has proposed a 10-year, \$10 billion investment plan that would:

- Build 100,000 new affordable homes.
- Rehabilitate 85,000 additional apartments.
- Create and preserve affordable housing for low-income and middle-income New Yorkers.

The Housing First! plan—developed in collaboration with housing advocates and many of the city's leading experts in housing and finance—

challenges New York City to make affordable housing a priority. It promotes a range of successful housing initiatives, including multifamily rental housing, homeownership, and supportive housing for homeless families and individuals with special needs.

Most important, the plan addresses critical housing needs at many income levels. Over 10 years, it would build or rehabilitate 104,200 housing units (56% of the total) for low-income households (i.e., those earning under \$33,000 per year), including 25,000 new rental apartments and 52,700 rehabilitated apartments for low-income households; 16,000 new supportive housing units for homeless people living with mental illness or HIV/AIDS; and 2,500 units

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Solving the Housing Problem in NYC

Housing First! – A Con View

By George Locker

After years in obscurity, New York City's housing crisis—the massive and growing shortage of housing units, the deteriorated state of existing housing, and the high cost of renting—has finally emerged as a subject for serious political discussion.

Central to the problem, but rarely discussed, is the city's huge cumulative housing shortage. After decades of not building, the city now needs some 560,000 more housing units (new and rehabilitated) than it has.

This cumulative housing deficit would include 264,000 rental units classified in the US Census as "physically poor," with significant structural or maintenance defects; an estimated 100,000 illegal dwellings, including basements, garages, and subdivided rooms; 100,000 households thought to be improperly doubled up in the city's public housing; 75,000 private households defined in the Census as "severely overcrowded"; and 27,000 in homeless shelters.

Moreover, New York's cumulative housing shortage is increased by sub-

stantial annual losses from the housing stock and demand generated by an expanding population. Each year, 15,000 units of housing are lost from the inventory and population growth adds 3,500 new renters. The city thus needs to build some 18,500 new units yearly just to stay in place.

Considering the cumu-

lative housing deficit, the annual loss rate and population growth, a program to eliminate the city's housing shortage would require construction of about 52,000 units a year (the rate in the mid-'60s), for 15 years.

In the 1990s—the boom years for finance and real estate—the average rate of new construction was

down to 7,000 units a year, mostly luxury, and the housing supply shrank. The failure of the thriving private sector to build and maintain decent affordable housing for ordinary New Yorkers in these best of times has, appropriately, refocused attention on the role of government in the production of housing.

Housing First! is a curi-

ous alliance of groups—those whose members suffer from the housing shortage, decay, and sky-high rents, and the financial and real-estate sector, whose members benefit.

It has launched a campaign for a 10-year program to be funded with \$10 billion in public money—including city capital funds, revenues from Battery Park City and the World Trade Center and redirected Federal aid. As I read the 34-page proposal of Housing First!, little of this public money would go directly to the construction of new housing, from the ground up, that would be owned by the public.

With the exception of 3,300 units a year of Nehemiah-type housing and 1,500 units a year of city-owned housing, Housing First! does not specify how the public's financial investment will be translated into actual housing units.

How many units will be newly built and at what cost? Who will own these units? How much of the \$10 billion is allocated to

The Housing First! Plan

Over ten years the Housing First! plan would:

- Build 100,000 new housing units.
- Preserve or rehabilitate 85,000 apartments.
- Produce 56% housing units for low-income households.
- Produce 44% housing units for moderate- and middle-income households.
- Include a wide range of successful housing models, including homeownership opportunities, multifamily rental housing, assisted living for seniors, supportive housing, and rehabilitated distressed buildings.
- The plan calls for \$10 billion of public investment over 10 years, with billions more to be leveraged from private, state, and federal sources. Some ten-year funding sources include:
 - \$5.1 billion from the city government's 10-year capital budget.
 - \$1.75 from Battery Park City Authority surpluses and World Trade Center privatization property-tax revenues.
 - \$1.1 billion from proceeds of sales of city-owned properties and tax liens.
 - \$500 million in redirected federal community-development funds.
 - \$1.65 billion from other sources, including housing-loan repayments, expanded property-tax incentives, and new city capital funds.

The Housing First! policy paper, detailing the 10-year housing and financing plan, can be found on the campaign's Website, www.housingfirst.net.

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RGB

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New board chair Steven Sinacori banged his gavel ineffectively as tenants chanted "Greed! Greed! Greed!"

"We have spoken until we're blue in the face and you have not responded to us," shouted Rochelle Thompson of Harlem.

"How many times do you have to hide your faces when you see somebody living in the street?" Lower East Side poet Cenen Reyes screamed at the board. "You see how much harm you've done to the city?" The board recessed several times because of the people shouting and chanting. During one recess, protesters linked arms and sang "We shall freeze our rents" to the tune of "We

Shall Overcome."

Lee Holman, a technical journalist from Yorkville, was one of four people sitting in on the floor in front of the board, along with Met Council organizer Dave Powell and Harlem activist Nellie Bailey. Police asked them to leave, but didn't arrest them when they refused to get up. "I've been watching my home be run into the ground for years. I'm tired of it," Holman said. He already pays over \$1,100 rent, and cursed several times while calculating how much more a 6% increase would mean.

Tenant groups have been calling for a rent freeze for the past two years. According to RGB data, landlords' net operating income has increased by an average of 10% each year since the 1997 law went into effect—even with the much-hyped fuel-cost increases of the last two years—while tenants' incomes have stagnated or declined. "We

have clear evidence that landlord profitability is at an all-time high," Coleman told the board early in the evening. But the board rejected his proposal for no increase, 7-2.

An "inside source" told Met Council the day of the vote that Mayor Giuliani had ordained the 4%/6% increases. Pagan says he didn't know, that the public members "don't meet with me."

However, when former Giuliani RGB chair Edward Hochman—a libertarian who opposes rent control, but told *Tenant/Inquilino* in June that repealing it outright would "cause riots"—quit or was fired in April, he complained about having to take orders from the mayor. The public members picked by Giuliani have generally been affluent whites who pass rent increases without a word of debate, not even a few platitudes about the need to balance landlord and tenant interests.

It is this as much as the city's skyrocketing rents that drives tenants' anger; the sense that the fix is in, that those charged with administering the system are not even remotely listening to their concerns. "I did my job," Hochman said. But under Giuliani, the RGB's job has been to raise rents as much as possible without damaging the mayor's political prospects—not that there's much left of those these days.

"I'm looking at the future," said Lismar Leon, 14, one of a group of Lower East Side youths brought



Lower East Side teenagers turn out.

STEVEN WISHNIA

to the meeting by Good Old Lower East Side. "You're going to see us teenagers living on the street, because apartments are \$1,000 a month. What kind of job is going to pay us that much?"



NYC Rent Guidelines Board Adjustments (Order No. 32)

for Rent Stabilized Leases commencing Oct. 1, 2000 through Sept. 30, 2001, including the Pataki vacancy bonuses adopted by the State Legislature on June 19, 1997

The above rent guidelines table shows the maximum increases landlords in New York City can legally charge for rent stabilized apartments on all leases commencing in the twelve-month period beginning October 1, 2000. Increases in rent based on the 1- or 2-year renewal guidelines can be charged only once during the period covered by the guidelines, and must be applied to the legal stabilized rent on September 30, 2000. The above guidelines and vacancy bonuses do not apply to an apartment which was rent controlled on that date.

Sublease Allowance

Landlords can charge a 10 percent increase during the term of a sublease that commences during this guideline period.

Vacancy Leases

In June 1997, Governor George Pataki, as a part of his efforts to destroy rent regulation, forced changes that gave landlords large vacancy bonuses. Provisions of his Rent Regulation Reform Act of 1997 allow the rents of apartments to rise by a statutory percentage: 20 percent for a 2-year lease, and 20 percent minus the difference between the 1- and 2-year renewal guidelines for 1-year leases. The new law also allows additional vacancy increases for apartments which have had no vacancy allowance in eight or more years.

Rent Overcharges

Tenants should be aware that many landlords will exploit the complexities of these guidelines and bonuses, and the tenant's unfamiliarity with the apartment's rent history, to charge an illegal rent. The tenant can choose between filing an overcharge complaint with the Division of

Lease Type	Current Legal Rent	One-year Lease	Two-year Lease	
Renewal Leases	more than \$500	4%	6%	
	\$500 or less (Rents that are \$215 or less brought up to \$215 after increases applied)	4% plus \$15	6% plus \$15	
Vacancy leases	More than \$500	Vacancy allowance charged within last 8 years	18%	20%
		No vacancy allowance charged within last 8 years	0.6% times number of years since last vacancy allowance, plus 18%	0.6% times number of years since last vacancy allowance, plus 20%
	Less than \$300	Vacancy allowance charged within last 8 years	18% plus \$100	20% plus \$100
		No vacancy allowance charged within last 8 years	0.6% times number of years since last vacancy allowance, plus 18% plus \$100	0.6% times number of years since last vacancy allowance, plus 20% plus \$100
	Rent \$300 to \$500	Vacancy allowance charged within last 8 years	18% or \$100, whichever is greater	20% or \$100, whichever is greater
		No vacancy allowance charged within last 8 years	0.6% times number of years since last vacancy allowance, plus 18%, or \$100, whichever is greater	0.6% times number of years since last vacancy allowance, plus 20%, or \$100, whichever is greater

cent for a one-year lease and 5 percent for two years. No vacancy allowance is permitted on vacant lofts.

Hotels and SROs

The guideline is 2 percent for Class A apartment hotels, lodging houses, Class B hotels (30 rooms or more), single room occupancy (SROs) hotels, and rooming houses (Class B, 6-29 rooms), above the legal rent paid on September 30, 2000. No vacancy allowance is permitted. The guideline is not collectible unless 70% or more of the units in the building are occupied by permanent rent stabilized or controlled tenants paying legal regulated rents. Further, no increase is allowed when the landlord has failed to provide the new occupant a copy of the Rights and Duties of Hotel Owners and Tenants.

High-rent, High-income Deregulation

(1) Apartments legally renting for \$2,000 or more a month that became vacant from July 7, 1993 through October 1, 1993, or on April 1, 1994 and thereafter are subject to deregulation. (2) The same deregulation applies in the time periods set forth in (1) above to apartments legally renting for \$2,000 or more a month without their becoming vacant if the total household income exceeds \$175,000 in each of the prior two consecutive years. To be eligible for this second form of deregulation, the landlord must send an income certification form to the tenant between January 1 and May 1 and file it with and get the approval of DHCR.

Housing and Community Renewal or challenging the rent in Housing Court to get a determination of the legal rent.

A prospective tenant who expresses knowledge of their rights will probably not be given a lease to sign. Landlords avoid renting to tenants who may be troublesome. Overcharging is very common. Every tenant should challenge possible overcharge. With DHCR, obtain and fill out *Form RA-89* to determine the correct rent from official records. Call DHCR at (718) 739-6400 to obtain the form.

Fair Market Rent Appeal

Another type of overcharge frequently occurs at the time that a previously rent controlled apartment becomes vacant and is re-rented as a stabilized unit. The Rent Guidelines Board annually sets what they call the

"Special Fair Market Rent Guideline" that is used by DHCR to lower unfair market rents for tenants who file the Fair Market Rent Appeal (FMRA). Under Order 32, it is HUD Fair Market Rent or 150% above the maximum base rent. No stabilized tenant of an apartment that was decontrolled on or after April 1, 1984 should fail to challenge the so-called Initial Legal Regulated Rent (market rent) that landlords charge upon decontrol. Use DHCR *Form RA-89*. Indicate clearly that your complaint is both a complaint of "overcharge" and "Fair Market Rent Appeal." The Housing Court cannot determine a Fair Market Rent Appeal. Formerly controlled vacant apartments in buildings converted to co-ops or condos do not become stabilized and are not eligible for a Fair Market Rent Appeal.

Senior Citizen Rent Increase Exemption

Rent stabilized seniors, 62 years or older, whose disposable annual household income is \$20,000 or less and who pay (or face a rent increase that would cause them to pay) one-third or more of that income in rent may be eligible for a Senior Citizen Rent Increase Exemption (SCRIE) if they apply to the NYC Dept of the Aging, SCRIE Unit at 2 Lafayette Street, NY, NY 10007. If an otherwise eligible tenant's current rent level is already above one-third of income, it cannot be rolled back, but future rent increases may be waived. Obtain the SCRIE application form by calling (212) 442-1000.

Loft Units

Legalized loft unit increases above the base rent are 3 per-

Housing First! — Pro

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of assisted-living housing for seniors. It would also address the housing needs of moderate- and middle-income households with an additional 81,500 housing units, including new rental housing and homeownership opportunities.

The Housing First! plan details an ambitious but achievable program for financing new production on this scale, relying on city capital funding and untapped or underutilized sources, such as the surplus revenues generated by the Battery Park City Authority and new tax revenues derived from the lease of the World Trade Center. The city's extensive infrastructure of housing developers, both nonprofit and for-profit, offers a significant advantage in addressing the housing crisis. So do the city's major banks, many of which have endorsed Housing First! and are poised with additional resources which can be leveraged by public investment.

But the key ingredient is expanded public investment. By any measure, the Giuliani Administration has slashed city capital investments in affordable housing, from around \$1 billion annually (adjusted for inflation) a decade ago to less than \$300 million in recent years. In contrast, the Koch Administration's "Housing New York" 10-year capital investment plan built or rehabilitated more than 150,000 housing units, the majority for low-income households. Housing First! seeks to revive the New York City tradition of successful, forward-thinking investments in affordable housing and the city's housing infrastructure — a tradition dating back to the first public-housing units from the 1930s and Mitchell-Lama.

There is no question that there are many other housing issues that need to be addressed, including tenant protections, code enforcement, construction

costs, zoning issues, remediation of polluted "brownfields," and rent regulation. Housing First! has chosen to focus on the production issue, and seeks to maintain as broad a coalition as possible to ensure that the need for new affordable housing remains high on the public agenda this year and next. However, many of the groups that have endorsed Housing First!—including Coalition for the Homeless, ACORN, the Association for Neighborhood and Housing Development, and other community-based and progressive organizations—continue to organize and advocate around a range of other housing issues, particularly those affecting low-income and homeless New Yorkers.

All New Yorkers, including tenants and tenant organizations, have a unique opportunity this year to press for a sustained, multiyear commitment to provide affordable housing for all city residents. Our elected officials and candidates need to hear from concerned citizens that affordable housing is one of the highest priorities on the public agenda.

You can get involved with Housing First! in the following ways:

- Send postcards or e-mail messages to the candidates for mayor and other city offices.
- Participate in Housing First! events and activities citywide.
- Spread the word about Housing First! in your community, building, association, etc.
- Sign on to endorse Housing First!

For more information about Housing First!, including fact sheets, flyers, updates on events, the endorsement form, a list of supporters, and a detailed policy paper, please visit www.housing-first.net, the campaign's Website.

Patrick Markee is senior policy analyst with the Coalition for the Homeless.



Jane Wood

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recipient of the city's largesse, in the form of low-interest loans for rehabbing his properties.

While we all would agree that replacing an elevator takes time, there are solutions that minimize the disruption it causes elderly or disabled tenants. Working on weekends, double shifts of workers are some possibilities. But by all accounts, this is not a priority for Scharfman. There were suggestions that tenants take a trip to the landlord's suburban home and let his neighbors know of the

havoc he is causing in the lives of his tenants

All this current rush to rehabilitate our older buildings in Chelsea and many other neighborhoods is, of course, an attempt to displace older tenants and raise the rents. Even better, taking the apartments out of the rent-regulation system entirely, by claiming to have spent enough on renovations to get the rents up to \$2,000.

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rent subsidies for units now in the private sector?

It is certainly not in the interest of tenants to support a program that will have little or no impact on the overall size of the housing shortage, but which will subsidize and inflate the rent levels of existing apartments using city money.

Even if Housing First! proposes to build 100,000 units of new publicly-owned housing (which I hope is the case), 10 years from now the city will have a greater housing shortage, higher rents, and a deeper and more divisive crisis than we have today.

Further, there are over 3 million existing code violations of record, including tens of thousands of the most serious classification. There are 850,000 apartments of tenement-era design and construction, 40% of the multiple-dwelling units in the city.

Because of their age and inadequacy of initial structural design, the physical condition of Old—and many New—Law tenement structures and the units in them are issues of concern. The public-health consequences of so much obsolete and deteriorated housing have only begun to be explored.

Housing First! is silent on the subject of code enforcement. Yet it is the lack of code enforcement by the city and the absence of owner/lender accountability that permits rents to be collected and mortgages to be paid while buildings are neglected to the point of abandonment.

A housing program unwilling to adopt programs to prevent widespread decay, but eager to invest public funds to remediate it, is antithetical to the needs of tenants and the city.

Housing First! is silent on the subject of rent regulations. Does Housing First! advocate the use of public funds to construct and rehabilitate housing that will be free from rent controls? Building or rehabilitating thousands of unregulated apartments at public expense may work out well for real-estate investors and money-lenders, but it is not a good deal for tenants and taxpayers.

Rent regulations have their origin in scarcity and price controls. Given the enormous shortages,

the declining housing supply, the unaffordable rents, and the demand for apartments in New York City, rent regulations were never more necessary than today.

Witness rent deregulation at Stuyvesant Town and Peter Cooper Village, Mitchell-Lama buyouts, the expiration of Section 8 housing assistance, and even market-rate sales of union-built cooperative apartments. All of these regressive steps underscore the need to build housing that is permanently rent-regulated.

New York is at its own crossroads. Progressives have not worked so hard for a chance to rebuild the city to squander the opportunity on failed and costly policies that increase the market value of residential real estate but not the amount or quality of housing.

We have long known that the best and cheapest way to build and manage decent, affordable, attractive multi-class communities is to do so on public lands, from progressive tax revenues, through a city or state housing authority, by itself or in partnership with private developers. The land issues alone—cost and assembly—would require a public entity with power of eminent domain, not a scattering of private initiatives.

A civic renewal project of this size would review zoning regulations, assemble public lands and brownfield sites, extend mass-transit lines, employ advanced construction techniques with innovative architecture, and reflect humane planning.

There is growing recognition that building housing in the public domain that is affordable and available to ordinary folks would rejuvenate the city, bring rent levels down and generate many good jobs in the process. Housing First! is not such a program.

Tenants, activists, and community leaders should be united in their call for large-scale housing construction under public ownership, strict code enforcement, and expanded rent regulation.

George Locker is a tenants' attorney and a member of the Five Borough Institute.

Met Council Volunteer Working Group Help Build Met Council!

Met Council holds open-house volunteer nights twice a month at our Fulton St. office. These meetings are task-oriented, focusing on the political work of Met Council via phone banking, mailings and letter-writing campaigns. At the same time, we hope to provide an informal forum for the exchange of ideas.

This will NOT be a housing clinic. If you have a housing problem and want to get counseled in person, visit the clinics listed on the back of this newspaper.

We meet the **first and third Tuesday of every month** from 6-8:30 p.m., starting September.

Met Council is located at: 339 Lafayette St. For more information call (212) 979-6238 x6.

Poor Tax Defeated

By Kenny Schaeffer

The Rent Guidelines Board's 5-4 vote against imposing a \$15 a month surcharge on apartments renting for under \$500 a month is a victory for tenants. In each of the last seven years, the RGB has imposed a "poor tax" of \$15-25 on low-rent apartments, contributing to the loss of half the apartments renting for under \$500 since 1993.

The poor tax has been the focus of intense resistance since the years when Leslie Holmes and Ken Rosenfeld were the tenant members. Last year, four RGB members voted against it: tenant representatives Jeffrey Coleman and David Pagan (executive director of Los Sures in Brooklyn), and public members Agustin Rivera and Bartholomew Carmody.

But of the three new public members appointed by Mayor Rudolph Giuliani the day of the preliminary vote on May 9, two appeared to be clearly responsive to City Hall: David Rubenstein, the city's deputy budget director, and new RGB chair Steven Sinacori, a 30-year old lawyer from Queens who is a former aide to Giuliani's chief of staff.

The one possible swing vote was Mort Starobin, who voted for the poor tax his first day on the job, but then stayed outside speaking to Met Council members for over an hour, and he ended up "guaranteeing" that the poor tax would "go down." Six weeks later, his prediction came true.

The median annual income of households paying rents of \$500 or less is \$15,000, meaning that 100,000 families living in under-\$500 apartments can only afford a rent of \$375 or less under the federal 30%-of-income standard. On June 5, the RGB heard testimony from Patrick Markee of the Coalition for the Homeless that the poor tax had contributed to the loss of 200,000 apartments renting for \$500 or less since 1993, leading to an increase in homelessness to over 27,000 people, including over 11,000 children, in shelters on an average night, levels not seen since the

Koch administration. Michael McKee of New York State Tenants & Neighbors spoke about its disparate impact on low-income households and communities of color, and Liz Krueger of the Community Food Resource Center testified about the increase in hunger, as measured in expanding use of free-food pantries throughout the city.

History Repeats Itself: First Farce, Then Tragedy

As the June 20 final vote approached, leaks and rumors confirmed that the poor tax was in trouble, Rivera and Carmody (who actually are from the business community, as all of Giuliani's "public" appointments have been) were believed to be pressing for an increase to 4% and 6%, in place of the preliminary guidelines of 3% and 5%, if the poor tax were defeated. Hours before the vote, word came from sources on and around the RGB that it would vote in favor of 4% and 6%, with the poor tax as well. The story was that Giuliani's housing commissioner, Jerilyn Perrine, was insisting on those increases.

It is impossible to know whether Mort Starobin voted his conscience or was implementing a decision by Liberal Party hack Bob Harding, the deputy mayor who calls the shots on the RGB on Giuliani's behalf. Or both. In any case, the final vote mirrored the original preliminary vote on May 9: 4% and 6% and no poor tax, before Starobin called for a "do-over," claiming he misunderstood what he had voted on.

But if the May 9 vote was a farce, the June 20 vote was a tragedy, in that further unaffordable rent increases are being imposed on more than 2.3 million New Yorkers because of City Hall's receptiveness to the real-estate industry. On June 22, Lisa Colangelo in the *Daily News* reported that the additional percentage-point increase was the result of intense landlord lobbying of City Hall.



New RGB chair Steven Sinacori calls for order. At right are Bartholomew Carmody and Mort Starobin.

STEVEN WISHNIA

City Limits

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WHERE TO GO FOR HELP

LOWER EAST SIDE BRANCH at Cooper Square Committee
61 E. 4th St. (btwn. 2nd Ave. & Bowery)
Tuesdays 6:30 pm
Note: This office closes for the month of August. It reopens Sept. 4, the first Tuesday of the month.

BENSONHURST TENANT COUNCIL
1708 West 10th St., Brooklyn, 718-372-2413
Monday-Thursday 10 am-5 pm
Call for appointment.

CHELSEA COALITION ON HOUSING
Covers 14th St. to 30th St., 5th Ave. to the Hudson River.
322 W. 17th St. (basement), CH3-0544
Thursdays 7:30 pm

GOLES (Good Old Lower East Side)
525 E. 6th St. (btwn. Aves. A & B) Lower East Side tenants only, 212-533-2541.

HOUSING COMMITTEE OF RENA
Covers 135th St. to 165th St. from Riverside Dr. to St. Nicholas Ave., 544 W. 157th St. (basement entrance).
Thursdays 8 pm

LOWER MANHATTAN LOFT TENANTS
St. Margaret's House, Pearl & Fulton Sts., 212-539-3538
Wednesdays 6 pm-7 pm

VILLAGE INDEPENDENT DEMOCRATS
26 Perry St. (basement), 212-741-2994
Wednesdays 6 pm-7:30 pm

WEST SIDE TENANTS UNION
200 W. 72nd St. Room 63; 212-595-1274
Tuesday & Thursday 2-5 pm
Tuesday and Wednesday ... 6-7:45 pm

METROPOLITAN COUNCIL ON HOUSING

Met Council is a citywide tenant union.

Our phones are open to the public
Mondays and Wednesdays from 1:30 to 5:00 p.m.

We can briefly answer your questions, help you with organizing or refer you to other help.

212-979-0611

Join Met Council

Membership: Individual, \$25 per year; Low-income, \$15 per year; family (voluntary: 2 sharing an apartment), \$30 per year. Supporting, \$40 per year. Sustaining, min. of \$100 per year (indicate amount of pledge). For affiliation of community or tenant organizations, large buildings, trade unions, etc. call 212-979-6238.

My apartment is controlled stabilized unregulated other _____

I am interested in volunteering my time to Met Council. Please call me to schedule times and duties. I can counsel tenants, do office work, lobby public officials, attend rallies/protests.

Name _____

Address _____ Apt. No. _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Home Phone Number _____

Send your check or money order with this form to:
Metropolitan Council on Housing, 339 Lafayette St., NY, NY 10012