



MITCHELL-LAMA RESIDENTS COALITION

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WEBSITE: www.mitchell-lama.org

Co-Op City shareholders suspend managing agency

The managing agency of Co-op City, New York's largest Mitchell-Lama development, has been suspended by shareholders for at least sixty days.

Marion Scott Real Estate, the Manhattan-based manager, had been hired by the Bronx-based development's corporate owner, RiverBay Management, in 1999. RiverBay itself will assume management responsibilities until a new agency is hired.

Co-op City's board of directors is now reviewing submissions by other management companies. Approval of a new firm will be required by the state's Homes and Community Renewal agency,

as well as by HUD and Wells Fargo, a co-financier of the development.

According to RiverBay, in a letter to HCR, Marion Scott had negotiated contracts for the 15,372-apartment complex without first securing the okay of RiverBay, and did not properly provide for insurance. The letter also alleged that Marion Scott did not properly manage its employees.

The suspension is only the latest source of tension at Co-op City. Another is a multi-million lawsuit filed by employees against both Marion Scott and RiverBay. Employees allege that they were cheated out of overtime pay.

Homeless population at high mark in city

Homelessness in New York City is higher today than ever before. According to the Coalition for the Homeless, 58,056 individuals sleep in the city's shelters every night. Among them are 4,938 families. More than a quarter became homeless seeking to escape

domestic violence.

The shelter figures do not include the homeless who sleep in parks and other public spaces in the city.

Nationally, one in thirty US children is homeless, according to the National Center on Family Homelessness.

Southbridge Towers votes to go private

Another Mitchell-Lama development will go private.

At Southbridge Towers, a 1,607-unit co-op near the South Street Seaport in Manhattan, residents voted recently to allow the complex to be transformed into market-rate apartments. Those able to sell--those who have the benefit of another home in which to move--will likely reap a fortune, around a million dollars each, according to some estimates. Many of them spent only around \$10,000 for their apartments decades ago, a tiny sum even then, made possible through the ML program's subsidy.

Slightly over two thirds of the residents, 1,082, or ten more than was needed, voted "yes."

The loss of the units at Southbridge, after a bitter, hard-fought battle, hastens the vanishing of affordable housing throughout the city.

Residents who do not want to sell, however, may opt out of privatization, essentially turning themselves into tenants. Their rents will remain below market rate, but are likely to increase up to five percent a year.

Strengthen MLRC
Join today (use form on page 2)

Tenants and the right
to counsel, Page 7

GENERAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING

Saturday, January 24, 2015

10:00 a.m - noon

Members are urged to voice concerns regarding their developments

Refreshments at 10:00 a.m.

CONTACT: Information@mitchell-lama.org

PLACE: Musicians Union Local 802

322 West 48th Street (near 8th Avenue) Ground Floor, "Club Room"

TRAINS: No. 1, train to 50th St. and 7th Ave.; Q, W trains to 49th St. and Broadway; E train to 50th St. and 8th Ave.

Mitchell-Lama Residents Coalition
P.O. Box 20414
Park West Station
New York, New York 10025

Downsizing policy reversed for Section 8 one-bedroom tenants

Tenants on Section 8 subsidies who live alone in one-bedroom units will no longer have to downsize to studio apartments, according to a policy revision announced by HPD in December. Downsizing was established because of federal subsidy cutbacks under "sequestration."

The decision was reached in part to the scarcity of studio apartments, and in part to pressures brought against the policy by tenant groups, especially the Housing Alliance Against Downsizing, and some public officials. Many of the tenants slated to be moved were elderly or disabled. They had

panicked because a studio does not usually have room for overnight visits from family, let alone day care workers.

So far, only around a hundred tenants formerly in one-bedroom units have actually moved. They will be allowed to return to a larger apartment, so long as they pay their own moving expenses.

The policy reversal applies only to those who had been living in a one-bedroom unit. Single people in a two-bedroom apartment will still have to downsize to a one-bedroom. Some two hundred of these tenants have already downsized.

State's tenant protection unit reaches accord with Brooklyn landlord on harassment

The NYS Tenant Protection Unit has reached a settlement with a Brooklyn landlord, Yeshaya Wasserman, who was accused of harassing longtime residents in 181 units. His alleged aim was to force the tenants to leave for much higher paying residents.

Some of the tenants have lived in their homes for over twenty years. Rents may be below \$1,000 for three-bedroom units.

The state investigation was aided by the Flatbush Tenant Coalition, which informed the TPU that the owner often did not cash rent checks; when tenants see that they have "more" money in their bank accounts than they thought, they often spend it, and then find that they don't have the funds to pay the back rent when the landlord

finally deposits the checks.

Other allegations were that Wasserman cut off heat and hot water, and served frivolous legal suits against them.

Under the settlement, an independent monitor will oversee Wasserman's business practices in both his current and future properties, for up to three years. The monitor will also audit rents to insure that they adhere to regulated amounts. Finally a \$60,000 compensation fund set up by Wasserman will pay legitimate tenant claims.

Wasserman is also facing a federal lawsuit by black tenants at Homewood Gardens Estates in Prospect-Lefferts Gardens. They allege that Wasserman is seeking to evict them through illegal methods because of racial discrimination.

UPCOMING EVENTS

GENERAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING

Saturday, January 24, 2015
10:00 a.m - noon

Members are urged to voice concerns regarding their developments, especially long- and short-term standing issues

Musicians Union, 322 West 48th Street, between 8th and 9th Avenues

For more information, e-mail: info@mitchell-lama.org

Mitchell-Lama Residents Coalition, Inc.

Officers

Co-chairs: Jackie Peters
Ed Rosner
Margo Tunstall

Treasurer: Carmen Ithier
Financial Sec'y: Alexis Morton
Recording Sec'y: Sonja Maxwell
Corresponding Sec'y: Katy Bordonaro

MLRC NEWSLETTER STAFF

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Assistant editors: Katy Bordonaro
Sonja Maxwell
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Margo Tunstall
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Circulation: 5,000

Articles, letters, and photographs are welcome. Send to MLRC, P.O. Box 20414, Park West, New York, NY 10025
Fax: (212)864-8165
Voice Mail: (212) 465-2619
email: information@mitchell-lama.org

JOIN THE MITCHELL-LAMA RESIDENTS COALITION

2015

INDIVIDUAL \$15.00 per year and DEVELOPMENT 25 cents per apartment (\$30 Minimum; \$125 Maximum)

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Fax _____ E-mail _____

Current ML: Co-op _____ Rental _____

Former ML: Co-op _____ Rental _____

Development _____ Renewal _____ New Member _____

President's Name: _____

Donations *in addition to dues* are welcome.

NOTE: Checks are deposited once a month.

Mail to: MLRC, PO Box 20414, Park West Finance Station, New York, N.Y. 10025

MLRC fights for you and your right to affordable housing!

Two victories for stabilized tenants: may file lawsuits, keep apartments

Rent stabilized tenants won two victories in cases decided recently by New York's Court of Appeals.

In one case, the state's highest court ruled that a tenant's rent-stabilized apartment cannot be considered an asset in the event of the tenant's bankruptcy. In the other, tenants can now file class-action lawsuits against overcharging landlords.

In the bankruptcy case, the issue was whether the assets of a person filing for bankruptcy can be seized to pay off part of his or her debt. In the current case, landlords argued that a rent-stabilized apartment amounts to such an asset.

The court, however, ruled that a stabilized apartment is a "public assistance benefit" rather than an asset.

The case in question referred to an elderly tenant who had lived in her Manhattan apartment on East 7th Street for more than forty years. The tenant had filed for bankruptcy after the death of her husband several years earlier.

Had she lost, she would have to find another "affordable" apartment in New York City today, a near impossibility.

Praising the court's decision, Assemblywoman Linda B. Rosenthal (D-Man.) said "The Legislature never intended to create a situation in which rent-regulated tenants in this State would be forced to choose between availing themselves of the legal protections afforded by bankruptcy and homelessness."

In the second case, the court ruled that rent-stabilized tenants may bring class-action lawsuits against landlords who have allegedly overcharged them.

Upholding lower court rulings in three individual cases, the court's decision allows class-action lawsuits to recover overcharges. However, they do not apply to cases in which plaintiffs seek punitive damages.

Landlords had argued that because the rent stabilization law grants punitive damages up to three times the amount of the overcharge, each case must be argued individually. Had this argument prevailed, most tenants would be dissuaded from filing suits because the legal expenses of doing so far exceed their resources.

HPD revises application rules for Mitchell-Lama housing

The city's Housing Preservation and Development agency in November adopted amendments to M-L application rules.

Among other things, the amendments now give application preference to the surviving spouses of veterans, not just to the veterans themselves, as was previously the case. But the veterans and/or their surviving spouses must have been on the waiting list at the time of application.

The amendments also tighten eligibility requirements. Applicants must now meet those requirements at the time an apartment is offered, whereas in the past the requirements could be met at the time the applicant first filed, which may well have been many years earlier.

Applications are transfereable now only to a spouse or adult child of the applicants, but only if the spouse was married, or the child was of age, when the application was initially filed.

Further, applicants may now submit only one application per development; if more than one is filed, the applicant will be disqualified. Likewise, if various members of a family all supply different applications

to the same development, they will be disqualified.

Rejections can be appealed, if the are submitted in writing within thirty days of the rejection notification.

HPD now has the an expanded right to waive occupancy standards for reasons other than medical, such as income hardship.

Further, if there is an available apartment but no current applicant for it, HPD may offer it to another applicant for a different sized apartment, rather than leave it vacant.

voucher cutbacks affect 100,000 families

Around 100,000 fewer low-income families were helped by the nation's state and municipal housing agencies in June 2014 than in December 2012, according to a report in the Huffington Post.

The reason is funding cuts resulting from sequestration, the automatic federal spending reductions in various categories that began in 2013, under the Budget Control Act of 2011.

Congressional funding, however, may restore some of them.

Briefs: NYC has highest rents in USA; Renters' illiteracy; Cost/benefits of free legal aid to tenants; NAHT conference in June

New York City remains the most expensive rental market in the country, according to real estate research firm REIS Inc. Effective rents here average \$3,185 per month. San Francisco is the second most expensive.

Soaring rents continue in many areas of the even though the U.S. vacancy rate rose by ten points in the third quarter of this year.

REIS commented, however, that the persistence of a weak labor market is serving as a limit on landlords' ability to raise rents even faster.

Tenants are less likely than co-op or house owners to be financially literate, and to face more serious financial setbacks.

A study by the FINRA Investor Education Foundation found that on the issue of financial literacy, 28 percent of homeowners incorrectly answered a small test of four out of five questions. For tenants, the comparable figure was 45 percent. The study also found that a quarter of USA renters have difficulty covering monthly bills. Only one eighth of homeowners face that obstacle.

“Comparing the cost of providing a lawyer to prevent eviction to the cost of providing shelter to a family that becomes homeless is staggering.

“A legal aid office can typically provide representation to a family for no more than \$3,000 a case (and many have contracts and receive grants that do this for a lot less). At the same time, the cost to the municipal government of providing a family with shelter, in a place with high housing costs like New York City, can easily well exceed \$35,000 a year.”

--Ray Brescia, associate professor of law, Albany Law School, in "Budget Like a Freak: The Economic Benefits of Free Legal Aid in Civil Cases," *Huffington Post*, 11/24/2014

The National Alliance of HUD Tenants will hold a "Save Our Homes" conference June 15-17 in Washington, DC. Registration and fee information is available online at <http://www.saveourhomes.org/pdfs/NAHTConferenceEnglish2014.pdf>

Court ruling likely to spur more ML cooperatives to exit

A ruling in December by the New York State Court of Appeals made it easier for M-L cooperators to exit the program, without fear of assuming a large tax burden.

In December, owners of Trump Village, a former Mitchell-Lama complex in Brooklyn's Coney Island, won a huge tax victory when the appeals court ruled that they did not have to pay a \$21 million tax bill levied on them by the City when they took their development out of the ML program.

The owners, 1,600 coop-

erators at Trump, argued that by taking their units private, they were taxed double: first when they exited ML in 2007, and again when they sold their units to others.

Despite the City's claim that a tax penalty is necessary to keep the units in ML, thereby promoting affordable housing, the appeals court agreed that the first tax should be nullified,

While thrilling the former ML cooperators, the ruling weakens the City's goal of retaining and promoting more housing affordable to middle and lower income residents.

NYCHA prepares to sell 900 units to developers

The New York City Housing Authority is likely to sell nearly 900 apartments in six of their complexes to private developers who will turn them into market rate units.

In return, the developers, L+M Development Partners and BFC Partners, will buy the units for \$150 million for a half-interest, and will give another \$100 million for renovations in three boroughs.

The units to be sold are in Campos Plaza, East 4th Street Rehab, Saratoga Square Houses, Milbank-Frawley Houses, East 120th Street Houses, and Bronxchester Houses.

For years, NYCHA has experienced deficits, and is feeling strapped for \$10 billion in repairs.

As in Section 8 regulations, the federal government will compensate the developers for the difference between NYCHA rents and free market rents.

And as in Mitchell-Lama developments, the developers would be allowed, after 30 years, to raise the rents to market rate, which would effectively undermine the original premise of NYCHA to keep all of its housing affordable.

NYCHA has reportedly said the apartments would always remain affordable.

Mayor de Blasio seeks to finance 16,000 affordable units in 2015

The de Blasio administration is seeking to finance 16,000 affordable housing units by the end of 2015. If realized, this amount would be added to the 10,800 units financed so far. Of them, some 5,200 apartments are on pace to be completed in the next few, the mayor said at

a groundbreaking ceremony of the Artsbridge senior housing complex in the Bronx.

Last May, the mayor announced a \$41 billion plan to create 200,000 units of affordable housing over the next decade.

Harlem M-L co-op completes application acceptances

A Mitchell-Lama co-op in Harlem has completed its waitlists for one- and two-bedroom units. Applications were accepted to a limited lottery, for which 1,000 postcards were selected each for one-bedroom and two-bedroom units.

Postcards--no envelopes--must have been received by December 27, 2014.

For one-bedroom units, applicants had to be

one to three persons. For two-bedroom units, applicants had to be at least three people, or brother and sister adults, or a parent/guardian with at least one child.

Applicants also had to be NYS residents 18 years or older. Current shareholders were not eligible.

For more information about the lottery process, click on <http://www.nyc.gov/html/hpd/downloads/pdf/Esplanade.pdf>

MLRC Developments

These developments are members of the Mitchell-Lama Residents Coalition

Individual Membership: \$15 per year
Development: 25 cents per apt. (\$30 minimum; \$125 maximum)

Donations above the membership dues are welcome.

Bethune Towers	158th St. & Riverside Dr. Housing
Castleton Park	Parkside Development
Central Park Gardens	Pratt Towers
Clayton Apartments	Promenade Apartments
Coalition to Save Affordable	RNA House
Housing of Co-op City	Riverbend Housing
Concourse Village	River Terrace
Dennis Lane Apartments	River View Towers
1199 Housing	Ryerson Towers
Esplanade Gardens	Concerned Tenants of Sea Park
Independence Plaza North	East
Jefferson Towers	Starrett City Tenants Association
Lindville Housing	St. James Towers
Lincoln Amsterdam House	Strykers Bay Co-op
Manhattan Plaza	Tivoli Towers
Marcus Garvey Village	Tower West
Masaryk Towers Tenant	Village East Towers
Association	Washington Park SE Apartments
Meadow Manor	Washington Square SE Apartments
Michangelo Apartments	West View Neighbors Association
109th St. Senior Citizen Plaza	West Village Houses

If your development has not received an invoice, please call the MLRC Voice Mail: (212) 465-2619. Leave the name and address of the president of your Tenants Association, board of directors, or treasurer and an invoice will be mailed.

Comptroller's audit faults state unit for delays on tenant complaints

In the fourth of a series of audits of the state's and city's housing agencies, Thomas P. DiNapoli, the state's comptroller, found that the Office of Rent Administration, a unit of the state's Homes and Community Renewal, took an excessive amount of time in addressing and resolving tenant complaints in over a million apartments in the city and various counties.

According to a statement accompanying the report, DiNapoli said most complaints, around 6500 a year, involve claims of rent overcharges, needed repairs such as broken elevators, cracked walls and peeling paint, and failure to provide essential services.

"On average," the statement said, "the agency charged with protecting tenants' rights took ten months to resolve a complaint, and needed more than a year to handle nearly one-third of the complaints; some took a staggering four years. Much of the delay occurred because it took ORA nearly seven months to assign complaints to an examiner."

The study said that "it took an

average of 15 months and as long as three years in some instances for cases to be assigned to an examiner. Once the case was assigned it was resolved within less than four months on average. As of May 15, 2014 ORA had a backlog of 5,883 open complaints, including ones that were filed before and after the audit period. Some of these were as much as ten years old."

The controller's recommendations include establishing time criteria for assigning, addressing and resolving tenant complaints, and documenting whichever cases fail to meet the criteria; investigate long-term open cases; and determining the level of staffing needed to adequately meet its obligations.

The report also included a response from ORA that because each case is different, overall guidelines for timely resolution of complaints is unworkable. ORA also said that its role is "quasi-judicial," and therefore requires fact-finding and opportunities for landlords and tenants to respond.

Construction begins on affordable buildings in Bklyn's Pacific Park

Groundbreaking for a new building with 298 affordable apartments near Brooklyn's Barclay's Center began in December, ending years of delays.

The building, part of Pacific Park Brooklyn (formerly known as Atlantic Yards), at 535 Carlton Avenue, will offer half of the units to middle-income tenants and half to moderate- and low-income residents.

Over the next ten years, assuming construction remains on schedule, the entire development should contain more than 6,400 housing units in fourteen buildings, along with retail and recreation facilities. Of those units, developers maintain that 2,250 will be at below market rents.

Battling intense community opposition to the enormous scale of the project,

which many residents of the area believe will overwhelm their relatively quiet, tree-lined neighborhoods, developers not only prevailed but received tax breaks reportedly worth millions of dollars. They were also exempt from the normal urban land use review process.

The key developer of the overall project is Forest City Ratner, which has partnered with the Greenland Group, a developer partially owned by the Chinese government.

Present at the groundbreaking ceremony were Zhang Yuliang, chairman of Greenland, and Cheng Lei, deputy consul general for the Chinese Consulate in New York. China has been exporting its construction and investment activities globally, so it is likely that it hopes, with this project, to impress city officials for further opportunities.

Coalition seeks \$1 billion for affordable housing

The New York Housing Conference, a coalition advocating for more affordable domiciles, has proposed that Gov. Andrew Cuomo allocate a billion dollars from the state's budget excess of \$5.1 billion to a capital fund to finance more homes affordable to the general population. The excess was generated by recent settlements from financial institutions, including the Bank of America.

Cuomo wants to spend the money on a one-time expense, rather than something that will need to be continually funded in the future, and NYHC maintains that its recommendations meet that criterion.

Rachel Fee, executive director of NYHC, said the fund would reinforce various state and local affordable housing initiatives, which use private investments. It would provide low-interest loans to developers, in exchange for affordable housing, under the supervision of the NYS Homes and Community Renewal agency.

But such loans, the NYHC insists, must be spent in addition to any current budgets, rather than used to compensate for budget shortfalls.

The fund, which would offer loans or credit enhancement to developers, would be administered by the state Homes and Community Renewal agency, and according to Ms. Fee, even though it would represent a one-time expenditure, any low-interest loans could be recycled back into the fund to invest in future affordable housing.

Low-income housing group in campaign against sequestration

The National Low Income Housing Coalition has joined NDD United, a coalition representing a broad range of non-defense discretionary programs, in urging housing advocates to sign onto a letter urging lawmakers to replace sequestration with a balanced approach to deficit reduction.

In 2011, Congress passed the Budget Control Act, or sequestration, which resulted in six percent across-the-board cuts to housing and most other discretionary programs in 2013, as well as in 100,000 fewer housing choice vouchers in 2014.

The letter can be signed at <http://nlihc.org/takeaction/ndd2106>

Happy new year to all M-L
tenants and co-operators

MLRC's annual holiday party draws members, guests, officials



The MLRC held its annual holiday party on Saturday, December 6, 2014. On hand were delicious food and lots of good cheer.

Many elected officials and their staff members visited. Among them were Manhattan Borough President Gale Brewer, State Senator Keith Wright, City Councilmember Mark Levine, and City Councilmember Helen Rosenthal.

Others included Tom Waters, Affordable Housing Analyst for the Community Service Society, and Tom Ricciardi of Independence House, which is fighting a major rent increase.



Photos by Alexis Morton and Carmen Ithier

Towns, Wright to focus on housing

Affordable housing, including preservation of Mitchell-Lama units and strengthening rent regulation for other housing, will be the focus of both the state housing agency and the Assembly.

In separate Q & A interviews in *City & State*, an online magazine, Daryl Towns, the commissioner of New York State's Homes and Community Renewal Agency, and Keith Wright, chairman of the Assembly's Housing Committee, both emphasized that protection of the fast disappearing homes available to middle- and lower-income residents will be a key priority in the new year.

Towns said that HCR "is on track to create and preserve nearly 14,300 affordable housing units, including the preservation of 8,600 Mitchell-Lama units that will remain affordable for middle-income residents for 40 more years."

Tax exempt bond financing

He added that a new financing policy, which consists of using tax-exempt bonds to underwrite affordable units in mixed-income developments, is succeeding, and that the state has already increased investments in several other programs. These include the Low Income Housing Trust Fund; Homes for Working Families; New York Main Street; and RESTORE (Residential Emergency Services to Offer Repairs to the Elderly).

Finally, he noted that the state's Tenant Protection Unit "has restored 35,000 apartments to rent-regulation that were illegally deregulated, and has entered into monitoring and monetary agreements with landlords to end the harassment of tenants."

Assemblyman Wright, when asked what his priorities were, responded: "Three words: rent, rent, rent."

He went on to say that renewing rent regulation laws--stabilization and rent control--"is one of the most important agenda items that we have to grapple with this coming year. We have to make sure that folks of lower and middle income who are affected by these laws will be able to stay in their apartments. And I'm not just talking about the folks in New York City—I'm talking about myself as well."

Wright lives in the same stabilized apartment in which he grew up, which makes the issue "personal" to him.

He added that specific issues on which he will focus include M-L, vacancy decontrol, revisions to the Major Capital Improvement system, and J-51 and 421-a tax incentive programs for developers.

Tenants and the right to counsel: a former justice weighs in

Should tenants who find themselves in housing court have a right to counsel, just as defendants in a criminal case have a right, established fifty years ago in *Gideon v. Wainwright*?

Many landlords would argue no, while tenant advocates would be strongly in support. Now those tenants have new ammunition.

A recent article by a retired Manhattan Supreme Court Justice strongly supports establishing such a right for tenants.

Emily Jane Goodman, who is now in private practice, argues that in light of the overwhelming resources commanded by landlords--an estimated 90 percent of them have counsel, while an estimated 90 percent of tenants do not--"there is no justice where one side in decidedly adversarial proceedings has professional legal representation and the other side has none. The landlord-tenant relationship has always been problematic, and always will be because of the imbalance of power. Nowhere is that imbalance and inequality clearer than when the antagonists get to court."

She noted that all people who are accused of a crime, regardless of their economic status, are guaranteed the right to be represented by an attorney. "But in Manhattan Housing Court, which, like Criminal Court, is filled with poor people, and where the stakes can be just as high--loss of liberty/loss of shelter--the right to counsel vanishes."

Noting that unless a right is enforceable, it is meaningless, she said that therefore the "public's right to access to the courts is illusory in the combative environment where a pro se tenant cannot enforce her rights to protect her home because she does not know her rights, the law, the procedures or the vocabulary. Typically, she will be frightened, intimidated, have language issues (with legalese, if not English). And she will not have a lawyer."

Because they usually have virtually no legal expertise, tenants, especially those of low-income, are often persuaded to "enter stipulations with the landlord's lawyer in the hallway that will waive defenses, rent abatements for building violations, as well as defects in the landlord's papers, and agree to judgments against themselves. Even if a judge does an allocution, as required, the alternative to a settlement is a trial with rules of evidence and a body of law not designed for a pro se litigant."

The good news is that Intro 214, a bill now in the City Council, would mandate that an attorney be provided for low-income tenants who are in danger of eviction. It would apply to Housing Court and eviction proceedings at NYCHA.

To those who argue that it is too expensive, Ms. Goodman noted that such a right will "reduce the costs to society brought on by eviction, homelessness, shelters--at \$38,000 per year per family--and damage to mental and physical health and education of thousands of displaced adults and children."

Housing now rises to largest expense for seniors

Housing expenses -- rents, mortgages, property taxes, insurance, utilities, home maintenance, etc. -- now comprise the largest spending category for older Americans, according to a new report published by the Employee Benefit Research Institute (EBRI), a private, nonpartisan, nonprofit research group based in Washington, D.C.

Although health-care expenses increase steadily with age, the cost of maintaining a home is typically the biggest expense for older people.

Householders age 60-64 spent an average of forty-three percent of total expenses on housing in 2011, adjusted for 2013 dollars; householders age 65-74 spent forty-two percent; and householders age 75-plus spent forty-four percent. In terms

of actual dollars, one needs to set aside around \$250,000 by age 65 to pay for the next twenty years of housing expenses. This does not include medical or any other living expenses.

In a separate study, almost a third of U.S. homeowners age 65 and over were still paying down mortgage debt in 2011, up from twenty-two percent a decade earlier, according to the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau.

Another separate study from Zillow, an online real estate search firm, found that homebuyers earning a median income spend 15.3 percent of their income on their monthly house payment, down about seven points from the recent bubble, while renters now spend 29.9 percent, up around five points.

Tenant alert: phony 'court' e-mail scam contains virus

The following information appeared on *tenant.net*, an online tenant service organization

Tenants and attorneys are reporting that scam emails, claiming to be from the New York State Court System, directing recipients to report to court and to open an attachment for more information, are infecting recipients' computers with a virus.

These scam emails typically instruct recipients to report to court on a specific day and time, and they often direct the recipient to bring documents and witnesses with them. They also typically warn that the court may proceed in their absence and that they will be sanctioned if they do not appear. The emails also instruct recipients to read a court notice that is attached. The attachment contains a computer virus. Do not open the attachment. Delete the email.

Be on the alert, if you are not involved in a court proceeding and have not supplied the NYS courts with an email

address for receiving court notifications, the courts do not communicate with you by email. The court system does not send unsolicited emails or requests for personal information. The court system does not send emails threatening sanctions if you do not appear in court. Nor does the court system send emails that ask you to open attachments in order to obtain additional information.

If you have a question about a notice you have received from the New York State Unified Court System, please call 1-800-Court-NY.

For more information about online scams, contact the NYS Office of the Attorney General: <http://www.ag.ny.gov/internet/common-online-scams> and/or the United States Federal Trade Commission: <http://www.consumer.ftc.gov/articles/0003-phishing>

Exhibit on NYCHA's residents at Brooklyn Historical Society

“We The People: The Citizens of NYCHA in Photos + Words,” will run at the Brooklyn Historical Society, 128 Pierrepont St. through March 11, 2015.

According to the Society, the exhibit challenges and confronts misconceptions and stereotypes associated with African-American and Latino residents living in New York City public housing.

The project, a collaboration between journalist Rico Washington and photographer Shino Yanagawa, pairs photographs alongside candid interviews with residents. Inspired by the documentary works of Jacob Riis, Gordon Parks, and Ruiko Yoshida, Washington and

Yanagawa conducted interviews in various housing authority complexes across New York City's five boroughs over a period of 18 months.

“We the People” features such notable NYCHA former residents as hip-hop artist/actor Yasiin Bey (formally known as Mos Def), jazz musician/recording artist Olu Dara, filmmaker Dennis Watlington, hop-hop icon Afrika Bambaataa, and many more.

The exhibit also includes an essay by Jamel Shabazz, a Brooklyn-born fashion, fine art, and documentary photographer whose work has been exhibited at the Bronx Museum of the Arts, as well as featured in films and album covers.

City Council seeks zoning changes to revitalize city's industrial base

With the goal of reinvigorating the city's industrial base, and thereby promote employment, the City Council issued a report in November calling for the establishment of three new zones or districts. These include industrial development districts (IDDs), creative economy districts (CEDs), and mixed use districts combining residential, commercial and light industry.

For IDDs, the proposals would

increase allowable floor-area ratios, eliminate or reduce unnecessary parking requirements, and offer space for larger commercial support companies, such as major retailers.

In the CEDs, the zones would significantly increase as-of-right density to allow for commercial office additions to existing industrial buildings and/or the development of new loft-style flexible industrial/commercial buildings.

Fed-backed finance units to resume affordable housing allocations

Two federally-sponsored housing finance underwriters, Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, will resume providing funds to two government-based organizations promoting affordable housing, especially for low-income and homeless residents.

In December, the director of the Federal Housing Finance Agency (FHFA), Mel Watt, ordered the two underwriters to resume allocating money to the Housing Trust Fund and the Capital Magnet Fund. The Trust Fund offers support to states to build and preserve affordable housing, while the Magnet Fund offers competitive grants to community-based groups also to generate affordable housing, as well as to offer rental assistance.

Such allocations by the providers were curtailed in 2008, during the Great Recession. Many blamed Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac for contributing to the recession by their willingness to underwrite troubled mortgage-backed securities issued and sold by private banks.

FHFA ordered the underwriters to begin setting aside funds for affordable housing in January 2015. Some observers estimate that the two Funds together should receive about \$500 million each year, of which two-thirds would go to the Trust Fund.

“I am thrilled that Federal Housing Finance Agency Director Mel Watt has decided, in keeping with his statutory mandate, that it's time to fund the Housing Trust Fund and the Capital Magnet Fund,” said U.S. Rep Maxine Waters (D-Calif), a co-author of the bill that created the Housing Trust Fund. She added that “By allocating a tiny percentage of Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac's profits to these Funds, we have the chance to improve the lives of millions of American children, families, people with disabilities and the elderly.”

Republicans furious

Reaction to Watt's directive by many Republicans was negative, if not downright angry. “In taking this action, Director Watt is making a grave mistake that harms hard-working taxpayers and violates both the letter and spirit of the law,” said financial services committee chairman Jeb Hensarling (R-Texas). “Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac were at the epicenter of the 2008 financial crisis that threw millions of Americans out of work and destroyed trillions of dollars of household wealth.”

He added that “Diverting assets to housing trust funds instead of repaying taxpayers or stabilizing Fannie and Freddie's finances only makes matters worse.”