



MITCHELL-LAMA RESIDENTS COALITION

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WEBSITE: www.mitchell-lama.org

Esplanade Gardens faces huge rent hike in spite of flooded apts, stalled elevators

by Millicent Reddick

Millicent Redick is a member of the MLRC Co-op Committee

Imagine a rent increase of more than forty-seven percent over three years. For the residents of Esplanade Gardens, a Mitchell-Lama cooperative famously known as the "Jewel of Harlem," that could very well become a reality if the complex's board of directors has its way.

This past September 7th, the city's department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD) held an open hearing with Esplanade's residents, to discuss an impending rent—or carrying charge— increase of 17.5 percent, or nearly a fifth more than what they are paying now.

Perhaps that might not be considered unreasonable in New York City, if it weren't for the fact that the residents of the six-building, 1,872-unit development had not already paid a whopping thirty percent increase (over three years) during the pandemic. The third year of that increase will start in November 2023.

The math is simple: 17.5 percent plus 30 percent amounts to 47.5 percent.

All the while, cooperators are still faced with flooded apartments and elevators often out of service.

HPD and Housing Development Fund, a nonprofit HUD-certified counsel-

ing and lending agency, decided to refinance the mortgages and begin a capital improvement project. This decision was made without any vote from shareholders.

The plan included renovations and improvement of elevators, plumbing, façades, swimming pool and the co-generator electrical system.

Sounds great, but to resident shareholders, the project is considered a capital nightmare. They continue to endure floods, destruction of their property, newly installed elevators that are in need of constant repairs, walls in their apartments remaining open for months, bathrooms unavailable, cabinets falling off the walls, mold, and asbestos.

As if that weren't enough, they find themselves having to restore their own apartments after contractors leave a trail of destruction (such as breaking items and not replacing them), having to buy plumbing supplies, and the like.

Further, empty apartments were used by the construction crew to store equipment and supplies. Common areas were taken over by the contractors. Terraces were shut down for more than a year.

(Continued on page 8)

New and preserved affordable units dropped 29.5 percent during year

The creation and preservation of affordable housing in the city dropped during the year by 29.5 percent, according to data released by Mayor Eric Adams's Management [Report](#) for fiscal 2022.

Combining data from the City's Department of Housing Preservation and Development, the Housing Development Corporation, and NYCHA, the report shows all three agencies either created or preserved 21,951 units in the current fiscal year, which starts July 1.

That figure represents a drop of 29.5 percent from the 31,126 units the year before. Observers attribute the drop mainly to increasing costs of construction.

An even bleaker picture emerges when considering housing starts, which fell from more than 29,400 units to just above 16,000 during the year, a 45 percent plummet. (A widely cited report in [Craine's](#) wrongly applied the 45 percent drop to actual creation of the units, rather than just the starts.)

On a more positive note, more than 6,000 New Yorkers were approved for affordable apartments through the Housing Connect Lottery in fiscal 2022, the Mayor's office [reported](#). An additional 2,000-plus formerly homeless families were placed in HPD-financed homes, and more than 1,500 households left shelters for permanent dwellings.

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MLRC Executive Board Elections

will be held at the October 2022 General Membership Meeting via Zoom. (Date pending.) Anyone interested in serving should notify us online via Mitchell-Lama.org or by phone at 212-465-2619.

The election committee will notify you and follow up with an application and interview.

CONTACT: Info@mitchell-lama.org

Mitchell-Lama Residents Coalition
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Fire breaks out on terrace at Independence Plaza North

A fire extinguished just before it became disastrous broke out on the balcony of Independence Plaza North, a former Mitchell-Lama development, in July. Had the firefighters arrived a few moments later than they did, the fire would have spread into the apartment and perhaps to other units.



Photo by Carl Glassman, Tribeca Trib

The fire, on the 32nd floor of 80 No. Moore Street, part of the three-tower-plus-townhouses complex just four blocks north of the former World Trade Center, was extinguished in about a half-hour, according

to firemen interviewed by the local community newspaper, the *Tribeca Trib*.

The *Trib* quoted the batallion chief as saying that "A few more minutes and it would have been a very different story. It would have burned through the door."

A resident interviewed by the paper recalled the burning of the former World Trade Center twenty-one years ago. "We have PTSD from 9/11," he said.

The complex, known as Independence Plaza North, was bought out of the program, after a years-long battle with the tenants, in 2004. A deal brokered with the then owner, Laurence Gluck, enables some tenants to pay a negotiated amount akin to rent stabilization, others to receive subsidies, and new tenants to pay market rate.

Glenn Gardens tenants angered over disruptive renovations

Exterior and interior renovations at Glenn Gardens, a former Mitchell-Lama complex on the Upper West Side, have infuriated residents who fear the ear-blasting noise and disruption are designed to force them out so that the owners can charge market rents for the vacant apartments. The noise has been "excruciating," they say.

A&E Real Estate Holdings, the owners who purchased the complex four years ago for \$220 million, deny the charges, according to an article in *The City*. They say that reconstruction inevitably causes some disruption, but that they respond quickly

to tenant complaints.

"We respond to any request for in-unit repairs within 24 hours, and we know from firsthand interactions that these views don't represent the vast majority of residents in the building," a company spokesperson said. He added that any tenant displaced temporarily during construction will be given accommodations.

Glenn Gardens, at 175 W. 87th Street, opened as a Mitchell Lama in 1974. Tenants who refused the buyout offer were granted the right to remain, either through Section 8 subsidies or rent-regulated status.

UPCOMING EVENTS

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Mitchell-Lama Residents Coalition, Inc.

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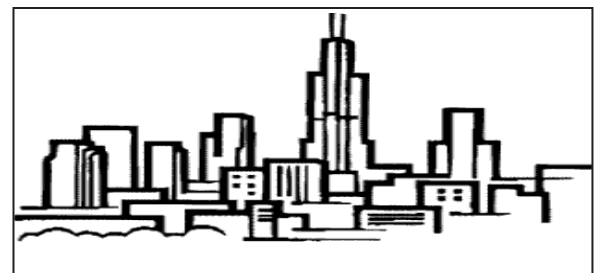
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Covid stimulus funds now available for affordable housing developments

A new source of federal funds for affordable housing became available in July, as the Treasury Department allowed states and local governments to use pandemic recovery or stimulus funds for long-term loans for housing developments (including repairs and operation) and, in some cases, for down payments to individuals.

The housing developments must be geared to tenants earning no more than sixty-five percent of the area's medium income for at least twenty years.

Prior to the new policy, which was announced in the form of a "guidance," localities could only use stimulus funds for various fees associated with a loan, such as for origination, application, underwriting, processing, and administration, rather than for the full principal amount.

As noted by the [National Council of State Housing Agencies](#), that former

requirement forced localities to scramble for other financial resources, and only for loans with maturities beyond 2026. This stipulation contributed to "complexity and transactional costs to the deal," the council said.

The new rule allows stimulus funds to pay for the full principal amount.

Further, repayment of the long-term loans can be reinvested in future affordable housing.

To qualify for the funds, housing developments must meet "four core requirements," which include resident income restrictions, affordability, tenant protections, and housing quality standards.

As noted on page 7, Rhode Island has already announced use of stimulus funds for the purpose. The state will serve as its own contractor, rather than hiring for-profit developers.

New Homeless Assistance Fund Endowed by large corporations

Donations from sixty-one corporations in New York City, largely in real estate, finance, and insurance, will provide around eight million dollars to a newly established Homeless Assistance Fund, a project designed to help homeless people move off the streets and subway stations and into housing and treatment programs.



The money will enable Breaking Ground, the nonprofit organization which operates a residence in Times Square and around 4,000 apartments in the city, to provide outreach teams of volunteers to deal directly with the homeless in an effort to persuade them to enter shelters and treatment programs.

The teams, which will accompany expanded police patrols, will now be enabled to enter areas previously uncovered, such as stores and ATM vestibules. They will operate largely in areas around major transit hubs and office districts.

Support for the program has come from Coalition for the Homeless, a key advocate in the city. Shelly Nortz,

deputy executive director of the group, agreed that corporate funding was crucial, although not as a substitute for the city itself investing in appropriate housing.

"We welcome the addition of more corporate support to underwrite expanded Breaking Ground outreach services, and we urge Mayor Adams to substantially increase city investments in permanent affordable and supportive housing so desperately needed by all homeless New Yorkers," she said in a [City & State](#) article.

Some advocates, however, were skeptical in their comments.

Kathleen Cash, an official in the Urban Justice Center's Safety Net Project, was quoted in a [New York Focus](#) article as saying "Corporate-funded outreach teams will most likely be focused on getting homeless people out of sight and off corporate property, far more than getting them housed."

Among the corporations participating in the fund are Apollo Global Management, Bank of America, Black Rock, Blackstone, and Bloomberg News.

HUD increases FMRs, adding to the value of Section 8 vouchers

Tenants with Section 8 housing vouchers will now be able to stay in their apartments or rent more costly apartments without having to pay any rental increase in fiscal 2023, as the federal Department of Housing and Urban Renewal issued new Fair Market Rents (FMRs), the category landlords adhere to when they accept voucher tenants.

Under Section 8, tenants pay around one third of their income towards the FMR (which includes utilities), while HUD pays the remainder. The issuance of revised FMRs means the government will pay more to the owners, which prevents any additional burden to the tenants.

In a release issued in September, HUD noted that, nationally, the FMRs will increase on average of around ten percent, reflecting the nation-wide rapid rental increases.

For Manhattan, the new FMRs increased from 4.3 percent to 5.2 percent, depending on the number of bedrooms. The chart below shows the exact increases. Similar increases were reported for the other five boroughs.

In its [release](#), HUD noted that President Biden's FY23 budget proposes 200,000 additional housing vouchers.

New HUD FMRs, Manhattan

Bedrooms	2023	2022	% change
Studios	\$2,123	\$2,018	5.2%
1br	\$2,170	\$2,054	5.6%
2br	\$2,451	\$2,340	4.7%
3br	\$3,078	\$2,952	4.3%
4br	\$3,316	\$3,173	4.5%

[Source: HUD](#)

Group seeks federal rent protections

A coalition of more than 220 tenant associations and community groups has asked President Biden to declare a state of emergency to address soaring rent increases. A report in [Shelterforce](#) notes that the group wants the President to issue an executive order "protecting tenants in both federally assisted housing and private rental housing with federally backed mortgages against unreasonable rent hikes, wrongful evictions, denial of lease renewals, and retaliation for organizing." If issued, the order would "apply to 43.6 million rental units across the country."

Parkchester forced to accept voucher under City's source-of-income law

Parkchester, a 6,000-unit apartment complex in the Bronx, must accept a housing voucher from a tenant which will enable her to pay the full rent, according to a court ruling.

The complex had refused to rent to a 34-year-old woman because she did not earn the landlord's requirement of a salary at least \$62,000 a year, even though the woman had received a city voucher that enabled her to pay the entire rent.

In his ruling, Manhattan Supreme Court Justice Richard Latin noted that had the woman earned the required income, she would have

been ineligible to receive the voucher in the first place.

He ruled that the refusal of the owner to accept the voucher was a violation of the city's source of income law, which prevents discriminating against applicants based on where they get their wages.

Before the ruling, the woman's low income had forced her to sleep with her two small children in a friend's bedroom.

Parkchester first opened in 1940 as a whites-only community but has evolved over the years into a diverse development, located in a mixed income neighborhood.

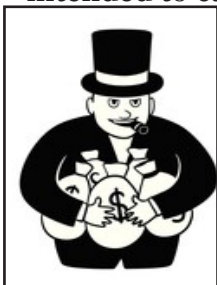
Notorious landlord group fined \$2.4 million for tenant paybacks, affordable housing

Ink Property Group, a Manhattan based real estate owner with a long record of harassing tenants out of rent-regulated apartments, was fined \$1.75 million to be used for affordable housing, plus \$400,000 which will be given to tenants, according to a statement from Attorney General Letitia James.

Principals of the firm, including Eden Ashourzadehm, Alex Kahen, and Robert Kaydanian, were found to have violated laws requiring them not to "disturb the privacy, comfort, peace, repose, or quiet enjoyment of a tenant in his or her use or occupancy," and engaged in actions that were "intended to cause the tenant to

vacate the apartment or waive any right afforded by the Rent Stabilization Code," according to the ruling.

The owners, one of whom—Kayda-



nian, was once included on the city's "worst landlords" list—and their agents "bought dozens of rent-stabilized buildings in low-income communities of color with the intention of illegally deregulating affordable housing for profit," James said in a statement. "Through a variety of illegal activities, Ink forced out rent-stabilized tenants so their units could be offered at market rate."

After purchasing small and medium sized buildings with the intention of ridding them of regulatory oversight, the owners would often "engage in a campaign to force out all the rent-stabilized tenants — first illegally approaching tenants with buyouts, then repeatedly and persistently subjecting tenants to harassment, and in some cases, creating hazardous conditions so tenants were forced to leave because their apartments were no longer habitable."

"They tore out bathrooms and apartments that were occupied, displacing tenants for no reason other than their bottom line," James said.

The court order also noted that the firm made misrepresentations to financial institutions, such as submitting false leases and false rent rolls.

Press reports noted that the owners did not respond to requests to comment.

Astoria housing lottery now open for applications

The Affordable Housing Lottery is now accepting applications for 145 brand new studios, one- and two-bedrooms at Halletts Point 7, at 3-24 27th Ave. in Astoria, Queens. Eligible applicants for this lottery must earn from \$25,372 to \$86,460, depending on the size of household. For more information visit <https://www.astoria-arentregulated.com/>

Supportive housing units for former women's prison?

The Bayview Correctional Facility, a closed prison at 550 West 20th Street in Chelsea that formerly incarcerated women, may become an apartment complex comprising sixty or more supportive housing units.

Supportive housing offers social services to residents who otherwise would most likely remain homeless.

Proposals to revamp the facility, which shuttered after Hurricane Sandy in 2012, will reportedly be sought by the Empire State Development Corp.

The building, which had developed a notorious reputation among advocates for prison reform, had once been planned to serve as a women's center, but cost overruns voided that project.



MLRC Developments

These developments are members of the Mitchell-Lama Residents Coalition

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

Donations above membership dues are welcome

Adee Towers	Meadow Manor
Albany Executiver House Apartments	Michangelo Apartments
Amalgamated Warbasse	109th St. Senior Citizens Plaza
Arverne Apartments	158th St & Riverside Dr. Housing
Bethune Towers	Parkside Development
Castleton Park	Pratt Towers
Central Park Gardens	Promenade Apartments
Clayton Apartments	RNA House
Coalition to save Affordable Housing of Co-op City	Riverbend Housing
Concerned Tenants of Sea Park East, Inc.	River Terrace
Concourse Village	River View Towers
Dennis Lane Apartments	Rosedale Gardens Co-op
1199 Housing	Ryerson Towers
Esplanade Gardens	Starrett City Tenants Assn
Franklin Plaza	St. James Towers
Independence House Tenants Assn	St. Martins Towers
Independence Plaza North	Strykers Bay Co-op
Inwood Towers	Tivoli Towers
Jefferson Towers	Tower West
Knickerbocker Plaza	Trinity House
Linden Plaza	Village East Towers
Lindsay Park	Washington Park SE Apts
Lindville Housing	Washington Square SE Apts
Lincoln Amsterdam House	Westgate Tenants Assn
Manhattan Plaza	Westgate
Marcus Garvey Village	Westview Apartments
Masaryk Towers Tenants Assn	West View Neighbors Assn
	West Village Houses

NYCHA blankets the news: Arsenic scare, ousting the CEO, law suits, great renovations, new funding, free high-speed internet

A scare of arsenic in the water and unrepaired damage from a long-ago hurricane once again reinforced the negative image borne by the New York City Housing Authority this past summer.

On the other hand, newly renovated interiors have brought joy to residents in



some 2,600 hundred apartments spanning thirty-seven buildings in Brooklyn. A new funding mechanism

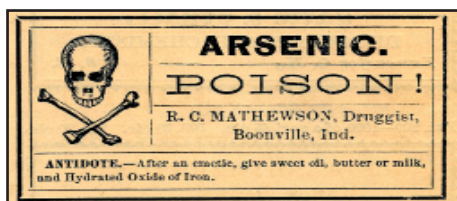
promises to generate tens of millions of dollars for repairs and renovations throughout NYCHA complexes. And a promise of free high speed internet could seriously narrow the digital divide among our neighborhoods.

First, the bad news.

Arsenic from the faucet?

Perhaps the most frightening was the scare in August and again in September of higher than normal levels of arsenic in the drinking water of Jacob Riis houses in Manhattan's East Village, which NYCHA discovered through tests conducted by a private contractor after receiving reports in August that the water was cloudy. Further tests by the HA itself showed no arsenic; later tests showed some arsenic; and still later tests again found the water clear.

So at this point, the water, in fact, is considered clear (at least of arsenic; some traces of



Legionella, which causes Legionnaires disease, may, or may not, have been found).

Residents can now relax. A spokesperson for the Mayor said that "We have now tested more than 140 points — both at the source and at the point of delivery — and we can confidently say the water at Riis Houses is and has been free of any discernible amount of arsenic since the initial tests were initiated in August."

Prior to this announcement, in spite of the flushing of the buildings' water systems, the Authority had urged tenants not to drink or cook with tap water for the

time being. So some residents of the 1700 apartments had been filling plastic gallon jugs with water from an open hydrant. Others had used bottled water supplied by the Authority.

In any event, the water is now clear.

NYCHA's CEO ousted

Call it coincidence, but as soon as the arsenic crisis appeared to be over, the Mayor's office announced that NYCHA's CEO, Greg Russ — who has held the title since 2019 — would no longer be in charge of operations. (He will, however, retain the title of Chair, plus a \$258,000 salary.) His general counsel, Lisa Bova-Hiatt, will take over until a new permanent replacement has been found.

While reports of his impending departure included a statement that it had been planned earlier, it's hard not to suspect a rather different reason, given the Mayor's comment regarding the change: "We cannot wait any longer to make transformational changes so NYCHA can provide safe, high-quality homes for New Yorkers."

Lawsuit over hurricane damage

As if the arsenic scare and personnel shakeup were not enough, NYCHA is facing a lawsuit brought by residents at seven HA complexes in Coney Island, who are arguing that the Authority has been seriously negligent in making repairs following the extensive damage caused by Hurricane Sandy ten years ago.

They argue that the failure to attend to the damage has allowed a busted gas break to fester, running water to remain a sometime thing, elevators out of service, and mold, which can cause a variety of health problems including coughing, wheezing, headaches, and fatigue, among others.

Now the good news.

Brand new apartments

Families in more than 2,600 Brooklyn apartments in nine NYCHA developments now have fully renovated modern living quarters, thanks to the completion of a \$434 million revitalization effort known as PACT (Permanent Affordability Commitment Together). Building-wide, the renovations included new roofs, elevators, windows, doors, plumbing fixtures, and trash removal systems. Inside apartments, tenants received full-scale replace-

ments of kitchens, bathrooms, new flooring and electrical circuits.

The renovations were coordinated by a public-private partnership including the Bedford Stuyvesant Restoration Corp., Arker Companies, Omni NY LLC, and Dabar Developmental Corp.

New funding mechanism

A new funding mechanism, the New York City Public Housing Preservation Trust, became a reality with the signature of Gov. Kathy Hochul. The Trust will allow NYCHA to raise its own money rather than depending solely on Congress for increased allocations.

A statement released by the governor's office said the Trust "will unlock the authority's ability to invest billions of dollars in capital to stabilize its buildings" by issuing bonds — that is, borrowing — and raising capital for comprehensive building renovations and improvements.

The trust also enables residents to vote to decide whether to opt-in to the program. And they will help to choose the actual vendors for the improvements.

Free Internet for NYCHA residents

Thousands of NYCHA tenants will shortly receive free high speed internet and cable TV service. Nor will they bear



Free high speed internet

any costs of installation, equipment, taxes or fees of any sort.

The program, known as Big Apple Connect, is a partner-

ship between the New York City Office of Technology and several internet service providers. It will run for three years, after which the City may continue it.

According to [Gotham Gazette](#), one provider, Optimum, has said that NYCHA tenants to be served include those at Mott Haven Houses, Patterson Houses, and Langston Hughes Houses.

Refurbishing play areas

And finally, the City's Parks Department and NYCHA have announced a plan to work together to revamp five of the authority's neglected playgrounds and open spaces.

Funding will come from \$23 million allocated for the purpose by former Mayor Bill de Blasio, [The City](#) reports.

State rule change would prevent market rents on combined apts

A significant cause of the shortage of affordable apartments in New York, and therefore of the current stunning escalation of rents, may be eliminated if a new rule change proposed by the State housing agency becomes law.

The proposed rule change, offered by the NY State Division of Housing and Community Renewal, would prevent owners of a vacant rent-regulated apartment from charging market rent for it after combining it with either an empty or occupied regulated or unregulated unit

Combined units to be rent regulated

Under the change, which would modify the 2019 Housing Stability and Tenant Protection Act, the new unit would be subject to either rent stabilization or another form of regulation. And the initial rent for it would be "the combined legal rent for both previous housing accommodations."

Likewise, if the owner keeps both apartments separate, but slices off part of one of them (e.g., a bedroom) and adds it to the other unit, the new initial rent would be the prior rent "increased by a percentage that is equal to the percentage increase in the [new] dwelling space."

Further, even those increases "may be denied if the vacancy was "due to harassment, fraud, or other acts of evasion."

Advocates have hailed the proposed rule as closing a serious loophole in the 2019 law, which otherwise was a boon to tenants by, among other things, voiding the old vacancy decontrol law—a law responsible for the seemingly incessant loss of affordable dwellings over the past quarter-century.

Landlords claim 'financial insolvency'

Landlord groups, such as the Rent Stabilization Association, the Community Housing Improvement Program, and the Real Estate Board of New York, are, predictably, warning that the closing of the loophole (in light of another provision of the 2019 law regarding recoupment of renovation fees) will so harm them as to imperil

the "financial solvency of their buildings," as reported in the [The Real Deal](#), an industry publication.

For example, the publication says, "Some of those units cannot be re-rented individually. . . because the renovation costs far exceed what they are allowed to charge in rent."

Actually, the law allows owners to fully collect rent increases for renovation, but only after the cost of the renovation has been fully paid for. Before this, tenants were required to pay such costs in perpetuity, a boon for which the owner provided nothing in exchange.

Owner groups are also bemoaning an accompanying rule change, which would modify the definition of a vacant building. Such a modification "could incentivize landlords to cause or allow their buildings to deteriorate, as vacancy alone would no longer justify an overhaul or demolition."

Traditional warnings

The warnings of insolvency, building deterioration, abandonment, landlord impoverishment and the like have been a standard response to virtually any form of rent regulations and/or building codes, from the old WW II rent control policy to tax abatement restrictions to harassment and eviction restrictions.

In any event, if the rules are accepted and become law, owner groups are expected to file a flurry of law suits—also a never-ending strategy.

Public hearing

A public hearing on the proposed rule change will be held at the Alexander Hamilton U.S. Custom House auditorium, One Bowling Green in NYC, on Tuesday, November 15, 2022, from 10:00 am to 4:30 pm.

Those who wish to speak in person should pre-register, by calling the office of Michael Berrios at (718) 262-4816. Written testimony can be handed in at the end of the hearing, or by email at 2022RentRegulationComments@hcr.ny.g

More information on submitting testimony is available at DHCR (718) 262-4816.

Comptroller offers plan to legalize basement dwellings

A plan to temporarily legalize basement apartments in New York City, and require landlords to provide both new safety measures and standard tenant protections, was presented by City Comptroller Brad Lander in August.

In a [statement](#) noting that tens of thousands of tenants are forced by a severe housing shortage to reside in basement and cellar units, Lander said his plan—which requires New York State enactment and is based on the 1980s Loft Law—would require owners to register all occupants and provide safety features such as carbon monoxide and smoke detectors and flood barriers as well as basic essential services.

The need for flood barriers, such as backflow prevention units, was included in the proposal because of flooding caused by Hurricane Ida which, along with heavy rains that overflowed the city's sewer system, killed thirteen tenants in basement apartments, eleven of whom drowned.



To meet the new obligations, owners would receive funding and the legal right to collect rents.

Their apartments would be converted to legal accessory dwelling units (ADUs), and would be exempt from some building code requirements, such as Floor Area Ratios (FARs), minimum ceiling height stipulations, and parking spaces, among others.

The proposal would, in addition, protect tenants from harassment and eviction.

To inform both owners and tenants of their new rights and obligations, the proposal would "Ensure robust, language-accessible outreach to occupants in basement and cellar units to promote awareness of the new program."

It would also create a new Board, representative of the dwellers' varying ethnicities, to administer the program, undertake inspections, and enforce tenant protections and the provision of basic services.

If adopted, the temporary plan would be "part of a more comprehensive approach to legalizing and expanding accessory dwelling units," the statement noted.

Affordable housing news from around the nation

National: Courts increasingly active in halting evictions

With evictions soaring above pre-pandemic rates in New Mexico, Indiana, Texas, Michigan and Philadelphia, courts in those jurisdictions have moved well ahead of local government agencies in establishing anti-eviction programs. These include pressuring landlords and tenants to negotiate, and coordinating efforts to funnel more financial and other resources to tenants. A report in [Bloomberg](#) notes that "180 jurisdictions across 36 states have adopted some form of eviction diversion since President Joe Biden took office."

Kingston, NY: Upstate city first to enact rent control

Soaring rents in Kingston, a city in upstate New York, has motivated the local government to enact a form of rent regulation, the first in the state outside New York City to do so since a statewide law passed three years ago permitted the procedure, which applies to cities with a rental vacancy rate of under five percent. In Kingston, the rate is 1.5 percent. Ironically, the tight rental market there is exacerbated by residents fleeing NYC because of soaring rents here, as well as by artists who can no longer afford NYC's loft space.

Sun Valley, Idaho: This says it all

"In the Idaho resort area of Sun Valley, there are so few housing options that many workers are resorting to garages, campers and tents." [New York Times](#), July 31, 2022.

St. Louis Park, Minn: Child care with new affordable housing

Residents whose family income is between \$30,000 and \$60,000 will be eligible for 120 units of affordable housing that includes an affordable child care center, a first-of-its-kind development. Common Bond Communities, a nonprofit group that spearheaded the project, organized the effort with both government agencies and developers.

Exemptions from rent regs: Elsewhere in Minnesota, developers of affordable housing in St. Paul are asking to be exempt from the city's strict rent control law passed last year. One such developer, Dominion, a corporate land-

lord who has received an exemption, has raised rents so high that "low-income seniors" are forced to leave, according to media reports. Under the law, owners can raise rents as high as eight percent annually to secure a "reasonable return on investment."

Los Angeles: Very few emergency vouchers are helping the homeless

Recipients of emergency housing vouchers had expected to quickly move off the streets or makeshift tents and into real apartments. But according to a summary of an [LA Times report](#) by the Urban Institute's *Housing Matters*, "Only 5.8 percent of the 3,365 emergency housing vouchers awarded to the city . . . have been used to help people experiencing homelessness move into new housing."

"Many who have been through the approval process for new homes say the city's housing authority had been unresponsive to their requests or slow to act," the report noted. "The housing authority's president, Doug Guthrie, attributes delays to staffing shortages, the Los Angeles rental market, and other factors."

Rhode Island: State to serve as housing developer and owner

Ten million dollars the state received from the Covid-19 stimulus allocations will be used to construct mixed-income public housing. When completed, Rhode Island will be the first in the nation to serve not only as owner, but as developer, thereby eliminating the cost of hiring for-profit contractors. The savings should enable rents to be set well below market rate.

Maine: Free college tuition no match for soaring rents

Southern Maine Community College offers free tuition and fees for full time students—an incredible deal with only one problem: unavailable affordable housing either on or off campus. A story in the [Maine Press Herald](#) reports that in order for one student to "make ends meet, [she] plans to work 40 hours a week for \$18 per hour at the job she just landed as a hostess at a Portland restaurant. That's in addition to taking a full course load at SMCC, which is required for her to retain the free-college scholarship."

Local Housing Briefs

Electric scooter explosion kills two in Jackie Robinson Houses

A six-year-old girl and her young mother living in Harlem's Jackie Robinson Houses, a NYCHA complex, were killed when an electric scooter battery exploded in August. The ensuing fire prevented the two from leaving their apartment. A similar incident happened at the Jacob Riis Houses last December, when the explosion killed one person. *The City* reports that three years ago the Department of Investigation urged a ban on the scooters, e-bikes, and hoverboards that are charged by the lithium batteries, but the ban has never been implemented at NYCHA facilities.

City Council passes bill to require most landlords to rent to ex-convicts

People with past criminal records may soon be granted the right to rent an apartment even over the objection of most landlords, thanks to a bill passed in August by the City Council. (Exempt landlords are those in owner-occupied buildings and single-family houses.) The bill, which still allows checking for registered sex offenders, is strongly opposed by owners and some tenants. At this writing, it awaits Mayor Adams' signature; Adams has publicly declared his support for former convicts facing housing discrimination.

Supporters maintain that such a law actually lowers the incidence of crimes, as indicated in a report from Indiana University's law school, which found that "Study after study has shown that securing housing upon release from prison is critical to reducing the likelihood of recidivism."

City leases eleven hotels for homeless families

Eleven hotels will soon provide shelter to homeless families, according to a report in [City Limits](#), which cited the Adams administration's claim that more than four thousand new immigrants have recently entered the shelter system.

In a related development, the Department of Social Services announced that the paucity of legal advocates to assist asylum seekers entering the shelter system has reached emergency status.

Soaring rent hikes cause a third of vacancies

Tenants whose rent hikes forced them to leave their apartments, where rents had been "discounted" during the early pandemic period, accounted for a third of the available vacant units in the second quarter of 2022, according to [Streeteasy](#). On average, rents had leaped 20.4 percent.

Evictions in city rising steadily following end of federal moratorium

During the high point of the Covid-19 pandemic, evictions in New York City plummeted thanks to a federal law imposing a moratorium. But when that moratorium, extended to January 15, 2022, ended, both evictions and eviction filings in New York City have shot up, according to a September report in [City and State](#).

Citing data from NYU's Furman Center, the report noted that "eviction filings, once over 112,000 in the first half of 2018 and as low as about 3,500 in the spring of 2020, have shot up again to nearly 50,000 the first six months of this year."

And actual evictions, as opposed to filings, are now "at their highest point since the pandemic."

Among the factors exacerbating the situation is a lack of qualified lawyers to represent tenants.

Notwithstanding the law requiring free counsel for tenants, several hundred attorneys are needed to provide counsel. As a consequence, according to Legal Services NYC, "Housing Court is on track to have 92,000 cases filed this year, with a total of about 500 attorneys currently available—but there's a need for several hundred more lawyers just to address all the new cases, never mind the backlogged ones."

Although various nonprofit groups are now in the process of hiring attorneys—often recent law school graduates—the demand still far exceeds supply.

Plan to convert hotel rooms to affordable units flounders with return of residents and tourists

As New York City's economy rebounds, attracting not only those who formerly left but visitors from other states and countries, the proposal to convert the city's underused hotels to affordable housing, much promoted by Mayor Eric Adams earlier this year, has lost much of its steam.

The conversion suggestion appeared at first to be a no-brainer, as hotel after hotel remained empty, tourism was at a low point, and staff was being laid off.

Last summer, the State, under former Governor Cuomo, passed a \$100 million program for the purpose. That was followed by another \$100 million in

June of this year.

With so much funding available, Mayor Adams had proposed turning 25,000 rooms into permanently low-cost apartments.

But since then, as a report by [Politico](#) noted, not a single hotel has even begun preliminary work on the project.

Factors accounting for the change in attitude include opposition from the Hotel Trades Council union, which has welcomed the increasing occupancy because it generates more hiring; the high cost of conversion; and various zoning requirements which, although since eased by the legislature, tend to dissuade hotel owners and contractors.

Esplanade Gardens faces huge rent hike in spite of flooded apts, stalled elevators

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Yet, rent was collected while all these inconveniences occurred.

To make matters worse, shareholders paid for an "owner's representative" who is rude, and almost never available to resolve the many problems shareholders have to deal with.

At the hearing, HPD provided information which included "Projected Income and Expenses," which reflected actual activity for 2020 and 2021 as the forecast for fiscal year 2022.

Why didn't HPD provide the actual

income for 2022? The fiscal year for the corporation ended June, 2022.

Real estate taxes would go up to \$1.7 million, yet the Shelter Rent taxes are being maximized by the corporation. The new elevators are expected to cost the corporation an additional \$900,000 over the next three years. The corporation will pay a penalty for early retirement of its mortgages.

Clearly, accountability on this project is crucial. At the least, shareholders deserve a hearing from the City Council's Oversight Committee.

HPD seeks proposals for 80 ecological affordable homes in Mott Haven

At first sight, the goals of providing affordable housing and mitigating extreme heat resulting from decades of human-made climate change would have little if anything to do with each other.

But if a City proposal to construct affordable homes in a low income area of the Bronx is successful, those two goals will be realized as one.

In August, the City's department of Housing Preservation and Development issued an RFP — Request for Proposals —



351 Powers Ave

South Bronx neighborhood of Mott Haven."

If it comes to fruition, the homes will be constructed on a city-owned lot at 351 Powers Avenue.

South Bronx is especially vulnerable

A statement from HPD noted that the proposals should indicate how they address the issues of both performance and "extreme heat in the region." It states that the South Bronx is "one of several New York City communities already vulnerable to extremely high temperatures [that are] expected to increase due to climate change."

It goes on to confirm what both environmentalists and human rights advocates have long argued, that is, that "New Yorkers in certain areas — particularly east Brooklyn, the South Bronx, northern Manhattan, and southeast Queens — already face increased heat-related mortality risks due to



socio-economic conditions that determine sensitivity to heat including age, income, location, tree coverage, and the percentage of dark, heat absorptive surfaces in their neighborhoods."

The statement encourages both minority and women-owned business enterprises, as well as community development corporations and land trust, to submit proposals.