MITCHELL-LAMA RESIDENTS COALITION

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June 2013

WEBSITE: www.mitchell-lama.org

8,600 M-L apartments to transfer to HCR in preservation move

Thirty-five Mitchell Lama developments in New York State, consisting of more than 8,600 apartments, are likely to see improved maintenance and retain their status as affordable housing when they are transferred to the state's Homes and Community Renewal agency from the Urban Development Corporation, a unit of the NYS Empire State Development.

The transfer, announced by Gov. Andrew Cuomo in May, will entail borrowing $54 million in fixed-rate bonds. Issuance of those bonds was approved by the state's Public Authorities Control Board.

In a statement announcing the transfer, Cuomo said "HCR is well-equipped to manage this important asset, and can now begin the task of preserving affordability and transforming aging Mitchell-Lama units back into safe homes that will continue to serve the needs of middle-class families and communities for generations to come."

Many if not most of the thirty-five developments have experienced serious deterioration over the past decades.

According to the statement, the thirty-five developments have been identified by HCR as most in need of rehabilitation.

Seven of the developments are in Brooklyn. They are Coney Island Site 9, Coney Island Sea Rise 1, Coney Island Sea Rise 2, Fulton Park Site 2, Rutland Road Houses, Coney Island Site 1A, and Marcus Garvey Brownstone Houses.

Four are in the Bronx. They are Twin Parks SW Houses, Twin Parks NW Houses, Twin Parks SE Houses, and Melrose Site D-1.

The Manhattan development is Harlem Canaan House.

The remainder are in the following counties: Erie, Sullivan, Montgomery, Ulster, Cayuga, Westchester, Monroe, Ontario, Onondaga, Franklin, Albany, Steuben and Oneida.

Earlier in the month, Cuomo announced $91 million in awards for "shovel-ready projects to build affordable housing across the state."

In the form of non-interest loans and tax credits, the awards are intended for the construction and preservation of more than two thousand units of affordable housing. The State is hoping that the awards will leverage an additional $485 million in private and other resources.

New affordable units slated for former Landmarks Commission warehouse

Fifty-five units of affordable housing will be built in a Brooklyn warehouse formerly holding the city's Landmarks Preservation Commission's architectural salvage.

The 16,000 square foot structure, at 337 Berry Street and South Fourth & Fifth Streets, is located in the Williamsburg Greenpoint community.

A design team comprising the nonprofit North Brooklyn Development Corporation (NBDC) and MDG Design and Construction, will oversee the project.

A press release from the City's Department of Housing Preservation and Development noted that the development will include a "new ground-floor commercial space for a grocery store, community space for a tenant services center, and open space for use by the future tenants." The grocery will sell organic food.

The site spans three lots on Berry Street, comprising around 15,870-square-feet. Originally, the city had expected to create only thirty-seven units of low-income housing, but an architectural redesign by Dattner Associates generated an additional eighteen units.

When completed, the apartments will go to families earning between fifty and sixty percent of the Area Median Income, or roughly $42,950 and $51,540, HPD said.

(Continued on page 8)

Strengthen MLRC
Join today (use form on page 2)

GENERAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING
SATURDAY, June 15, 2013

Time: 10:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.

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

SSA: Seniors spend more money on housing than on any other item

Housing is the largest component of expenditures for consumers aged 65 or older, according to a newly released report by the Social Security Administration. Specifically, housing accounted for thirty-five percent of seniors' total expenditures, or well more than double the next highest expense, which was transportation (fourteen percent).

As in all professional studies, however, the data vary by income status. For example, the poorest consumers, or those who have annual incomes of $16,207 or less, spend more on housing (42.6%) than the average retirees.

The next most expensive item, food--for those in the oldest age groups--counts for sixteen to seventeen percent of annual expenditures.

Although Congress and the White House are now debating whether to cut Social Security, reportedly to help consumers and the economy, the SSA report found that Social Security payroll taxes and pension contributions were "small components of total expenditures) 3 percent and 1 percent, respectively."

The full report is available at *http://www.ssa.gov/policy/docs/chartbooks/expenditures_aged/2010/exp-aged-2010.pdf*

Study: Auto exhaust fumes cause as much childhood asthma as second-hand smoke

A new European study of childhood asthma found that fourteen percent of the disease in children can be attributable to heavy traffic, because of the toxins in automotive exhaust. That is within the range of second-hand smoke as a cause of the illness.

Based on an examination of health data in ten European cities, and accounting for other factors such as chain-smoking parents and socioeconomic status, the study, by the Swiss Tropical and Public Health Institute, found that road traffic is a significant contributor to the "onset of the disease in children."

Until the study, it had been assumed that traffic pollution may have sparked the onset of asthma, but did not account for chronic asthma that is caused by the toxic materials in abundance near widely traveled roads.

According to the lead author, Dr. Laura Perez, "Air pollution has previously been seen to trigger symptoms but this is the first time we have estimated the percentage of cases that might not have occurred if Europeans had not been exposed to road traffic pollution." The full study will be published in the European Respiratory Journal.

On the Upper East Side, residents are fighting a plan for a new trash facility that will vastly increase diesel-based vehicular traffic.

JOIN THE MITCHELL-LAMA RESIDENTS COALITION 2013

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

Name______________________________

Address______________________ **Apt.**__________

City__________ **State**__________ **Zip Code**__________

Evening Phone__________ **Day Phone**__________

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!

UPCOMING EVENTS

GENERAL MEMBERSHIP

Saturday, June 15, 2013

10:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.

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

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Musicians Union, 322 W. 48 St., between 8th & 9th Aves

For more information, e-mail: information@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
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Fax (212)864-8165
Voice mail: (212) 465-2619
E-mail: information@mitchell-lama.org

Politicos speak to MLRC on affordable housing issues

City, state and federal office holders and those aspiring to such came out in force at the MLRC's annual Meet & Greet event on May 14. They spoke at a microphone, they conferred with residents, they showed their support. Carl Glassman, a tenant at IPN and publisher of the Tribeca Trib, took all the photos.

Robert Johnson

Jackie Peters, MLRC

Letitia James

Julie Menin

Scott Stringer

Christine Quinn

Jerrold Nadler

John Liu

Daniel Squadron

William Thomson

Gale Brewer

Left column, from top: **Letitia James, Councilmember and candidate for Public Advocate, with MLRC board member Alice Mitchell; Christine Quinn, City Council Speaker and Mayoral candidate; Daniel Squadron, State Senator and candidate for Public Advocate.** ***Center column, from top***: **Robert Johnson, Councilmember and candidate for Manhattan Borough President; Julie Menin, former Chair of CB1 and candidate for Manhattan Borough President; Jerrold Nadler, U.S. Congressman from New York; William Thomson, former NYC Controller and Mayoral candidate.** ***Right column, from top***: **Jackie Peters, MLRC Co-Chair; Scott Stringer, Manhattan Borough President and candidate for Controller; John Liu, New York City Controller and Mayoral candidate; Gale Brewer, City Councilmember and candidate for Manhattan Borough President, with Carmen Ithier, MLRC treasurer.**

Coney Island ML tenants sue over lack of elevator service

With elevators out of service since Hurricane Sandy, a group of mostly elderly tenants in a Coney Island Mitchell-Lama building are suing the landlord and HPD. They are supported by Rep. Hakeem Jeffries and various advocacy groups. The building is at 2770 West 33rd Street, otherwise known as Site 4A-1 Houses.

Tenants, some of whom are handicapped, have been complaining that the absence of an elevator imposes severe hardship. For example, some have to lug carts full of groceries up five flights of stairs, step by step; others have asthma and find it extremely difficult to walk those flights.

Around seventy-five families inhabit the five-story building on West 33rd Street. For the first three months after Sandy, they were without any power at all.

According to an attorney with Legal Services NYC, the owner has an obligation to "keep the buildings habitable and safe for tenants."

The building's management company said that they've been waiting for all parts to arrive before the elevator work can be completed.

Rental vacancies tightening in most areas of the nation

It's becoming more difficult to find a vacant apartment to rent these days, as vacancy rates conintue to fall.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, four times as many metropolitan areas experienced rental vacancies declining as those experiencing an increase. For the nation as a whole, vacancy rates fell from 8.4 percent in 2009 to 7.4 percent in 2011.

Over the same period, the number of households that were renting rose; almost a quarter of the nation's households saw a rise in rentals. Fewer than three percent saw a drop.

As with other studies (see page 2), the Census Bureau report showed that more tenants spend an increasing portion of their income on rent.

"While we saw a decrease in rental vacancy rates and pricing in some areas, the burden of rental costs on households increased across many parts of the nation," said Arthur Cresce, assistant division chief for housing characteristics at the Census Bureau.

One factor accounting for the declining availability of rentals may be the crushing debt that so many of today's college students take on. Students owe so much that they cannot afford a down payment on a house, condo or co-op. A study by the Federal Reserve found that two- thirds of student loans are held by people under the age of forty. The number of homeowners in that age group fell by 4.6 percent in the fourth quarter from the third, the biggest drop since 1982.

An online article in *Bloomberg* quoted Robert Lawless, a professor at the University of Illinois School of Law as saying that "Buying a home and having a family are the hallmarks of middle-class American life. The hope is still alive, but for now a lot of people are being forced to rent because all their money is going to pay off their student loans."

A large part of the problem may be attributed to bankers who promoted subpar student loans in the same slipshod manner that they promoted subpar mortgage loans.

"In the run-up to the 2008 economic crisis, underwriting standards for private student loans loosened as they were packaged into securities and sold to investors, much like subprime mortgage bonds. Credit-score standards slipped, and some lenders didn't even check to make sure the borrower was in school," according to the *Bloomberg* article.

Federal census report shows homeownership level declining

Fewer Americans are buying into the national dream of owning a home, according to the U.S. Census Bureau.

For the first quarter of 2013, the Bureau reported that the homeownership rate dropped more steeply than it had since 2005, to sixty-five percent. The decline reflects the continuing troubled state of the economy, difficulty in securing mortgages, and an increase in the number of people choosing to rent rather than own.

At the same time, the homeowner vacancy rate, at 2.1 percent, was lower than it had been since 2006. While seemingly paradoxical, the low vacancy rate reflects that fewer people are buying, so that sellers are forced to remain in their homes.

What is paradoxical is that the median rent for vacant units is higher today, nationally, than it has ever been, notwithstanding steep unemployment and depressed economic conditions in general. In 2013, the median rent was around $750; that compares with around $475 eighteen years ago. (Again, these are national figures; for New York City, San Francisco, Chicago and other prime areas, rents are many times the national median.) Neither the recession of 2001, nor the Great Recession of 2008-9, seemed to have any downward effect on rents.

The Census Bureau's release is accessible at http://www.census.gov/housing/hvs/files/currenthvspress.pdf

New REIT created for affordable housing

A new real estate investment trust has been formed by nonprofit groups to preserve affordable housing. The Housing Partnership Equity Trust's purpose is to acquire apartment buildings across the country, mainly in communities where rising real-estate values have prompted landlords to gentrify, and keep rents affordable to low- and moderate-income tenants. Appealing to socially responsible investors, the reit receives foundation and corporate funding.

MLRC Developments

Individual Membership: $15 per year
Development: 25 cents per apt. ($30 minimum; $125 maximum)
Donations above the membership dues are welcome.

These developments are members of the Mitchell-Lama Residents Coalition

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

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.

'Affordable' housing at Hudson Yards remains largely a promise

Hudson Yards, the new development on mid-Manhattan's far west side, "will transform the city's landscape with innovative architecture, imaginative new parks, arts and culture to create a neighborhood New Yorkers will love."

Or so says the online ad from Related Companies, one of the key developers, extolling the plan to create a spanking new urban environment replete with parks and bars and phenomenal apartments.

Guess who will be able to rent those apartments?

Not most of us, that's for sure, in spite of the promise from the developer, with support from the City Council, that at least twenty-eight percent of the rental units will be set aside as affordable.

Back in 2005, the Council endorsed Mayor Bloomberg's plan to provide three billion dollars of public funding to extend the No. 7 subway line to Eleventh Avenue and 34th Street to spur development there. The Council also extended the 421A tax abatement program to developers, after extracting the promise of the affordable apartments.

But according to the Daily News review, "Nearly eight years later, only 16% of the first 5,600 units that have opened for occupancy are affordable."

The review also revealed that many of the affrodable units are tiny one-bedrooms (400 to 600 square feet) and studios--often far smaller than the market-rate studios and one-bedrooms located in the same buildings. At another site, owned by developer Larry Silverstein, a completely separate "affordable" building containing eighty-eight units was built, with "a dark, tiny lobby that faces the back of an MTA bus depot and the entrance to the Lincoln Tunnel." By contrast, the high rent towers have huge luxurious lobbies as well as a giant swimming pool.

Talk about separate and unequal.

Community Board 4 unanimously protested th development. . . to no avail.

And at the Related Companies project at 42nd Street and Tenth Avenue, the block-square development includes 200 luxury condos, a luxury hotel, underground garage and retail stores, as well as more than 620 rentals. Of those rentals, 163 are defined as affordable. Here as well, half are tiny studios, and half are tiny one-bedrooms.

Stuy-town, Peter Cooper tenants hit with whopping hikes mid-lease

Tenants in Stuyvesant Town and Peter Cooper Village on Manhattan's east side were stunned upon learning about a whopping rent increase that will be imposed on them beginning July 1, an unexpected consequence of the settlement that had been reached following the former owner's rent overcharges.

The owner, bondholder CW Capital, informed the 1,300 tenants about the increase, which amounts to twenty percent--and ranges up to $1,100 dollars per month--in a letter slipped under their doors.

The increases will be imposed regardless of the fact that the tenants' leases have not expired. Local politicians condemned the practice of raising rents mid-lease.

The original settlement, worth $173 million, was finalized with the former owner, Tishman Speyer, which had illegally eliminated rent stabilization from around 4,300 units. Tishman Speyer had been receiving tax abatements under the City's J51 program, but neglected to adhere to the program's requirement that the apartments be placed under rent stabilization.

The tenants initially won a victory in the form of lower rents, but that victory was temporary: under a permanent settlement reached in November, CWCapital was given the option to increase rents in the middle of leases.

Media reports indicated that some of the tenants were considering a rent strike.

Esplanade Gardens residents learn organizing methods from MLRC board members

More than a hundred residents at Esplanade Gardens, a ML development in Harlem, were provided with MLRC organizing tips at their April meeting. Concerns expressed included several rent increases received over the past few years; new increases planned; and the use of business rental spaces. Board member Natalie Williams explained some of the rights and responsibilities of share holders. Attendees were urged to join organizations that offer information about Mitchell-Lama Co-ops, meet together to establish problems and solutions, research their development, stay in contact with other Mitchell-Lama co-ops, and join the MLRC to strengthen their voice.

Seek time and work limits for public housing

Public housing authorities across the nation are voicing support for a federal initiative that would allow them to either set time limits on residency and Section 8 vouchers, impose work requirements, or both.

Many are supporting an expansion of the 1996 federal pilot program, called Moving to Work, that enabled selected housing authorities to utilize non-traditional methods regarding residency.

As described by HUD, "Moving to Work (MTW) is a demonstration program for public housing authorities (PHAs) that provides them the opportunity to design and test innovative, locally-designed strategies that use Federal dollars more efficiently, help residents find employment and become self-sufficient, and increase housing choices for low-income families. MTW gives PHAs exemptions from many existing public housing and voucher rules and more flexibility with how they use their Federal funds."

Last month the Wall Street Journal reported that the Obama administration is seeking to expand the pilot nationwide. At present, only 39 authorities out of 32,000 have the power to impose the limits, the WSJ said.

Housing authorities in the pilot project undertook a variety of approaches to the requirements. In most if not all cases, elderly and disabled residents were excluded from the restrictions. Some agencies set time limits for the restrictions. Others imposed hardship reviews; still others provided staff to assist in job finding.

The issue is highly controversial among housing advocates and commentators. As summarized by the Urban Institute, a nonpartisan think tank, "Some observers maintain that non-time limited asistance ensures that low-income recipients are not deprived of affordable housing. Others, however, contend that having no time limits undermines housing assistance recipients' progression towards self-sufficiency.

"Also, because demand for public housing units and vouchers exceeds supply, when households retain benefits for long periods of time the total number of eligible households served is smaller than would be the case if the assistance were time-limited; hence, the interests of those receiving assistance are juxtaposed with those of equally eligible households not receiving it."

The Urban Institute also conducted informal interviews and discussion groups with residents of the agencies in the pilot program. It noted that time limits "motivated some, yet paralyzed others."

The full report is available at *http://www.areainc.net/webmedia/PublicHsgAgencyExperthatEstabTimeLmts*.

Poor kids stay back: new IPN play area, gym only for fair market tenants

A spanking new children's play area, and adult physical fitness center are coming to Independence Plaza North, a former Mitchell-Lama complex in Manhattan's Tribeca community. But for the children of those tenants who had been protected for years under the M-L program and who now either receive federal Section 8 vouchers or are covered under a 2004 agreement with the landlord, the play area is off limits.

As is the gym for adults.

As of this writing, only those who pay free or fair market rents—which in the past few years have skyrocketed to Alpine heights—will be permitted to enjoy the amenities. This, in spite of the fact that the complex's owners, Laurence Gluck's Stellar Management and Vornado Realty Trust, receive millions each year from federal vouchers.

In response to a question about the new policy, a company employee wrote to a tenant leader that "The gym/play area will be accessible to Fair Market tenants only."

The tenant assocation, IPNTA, has requested a meeting with the owners to lift the restrictions.

IPNTA also cites the city's Human Rights law, which states that "lawful source of income discrimination" is prohibited. Since the IPN policy specifically discriminates against tenants whose lawful source of income is government vouchers, IPNTA says the policy is inherently discriminatory.

Once a haven for working low-, moderate- and middle-income people, newly vacant apartments at IPN are now all but out of reach. According to a company website, a one-bedroom unit now rents for $4,695. Two-bedroom units rent for nearly twice that amount.

As one of the tenant organizers noted, "someone said to me it reminds them of the days when there would be a sign that said, 'This bathroom for whites only.'"

And a local resident wrote: "Classy! Maybe next you could have the doormen only greet the fair-market tenants--that's be a great way to drive the wedge a little deeper."

Hansen, Calceterra appointed to community, housing posts

Gov. Andrew Cuomo announced two housing related State appointments in May. They are Amanda P. Hansen, who will serve as policy director for the Community Reconstruction Zone Program, and Regina Calceterra, who will serve as chief operating officer of HCR. Ms. Hansen has recently served on the White House Council on Environmental Quality; Ms. Calceterra served on the Moreland Commission on Utility Preparation and Response.

MHANY wins 2013 affordable housing development award

The Association for Neighborhood Housing Development announced in May that the Mutual Housing Association of New York is the winner of the 2013 Affordable Housing Development of the Year award for its project, Phoenix Estates.

According to a statement from ANHD, "The award recognizes a nuts-and-bolts housing development done by a not-for-profit that has a major, positive impact on both the residents and neighborhood.

"The Phoenix Estates development highlights the ability of community-based, non-profit developers to take extremely challenging buildings and turn them into meaningful affordable housing assets for New York City's low income communities. A 125-unit, 100% project-based Section 8 development, in 2007 it went through foreclosure and the temporary loss of its Section 8 contract. The 125 families that called it home lived in terrible, virtually uninhabitable conditions and were confronted with the wholesale loss of their rental subsidy.

"However, working with Tenants & Neighbors, the tenants organized to preserve their homes and maintain the 125 units, 100% project-based Section 8 as an affordable housing resource critical to the neighborhood. MHANY Management stepped in as lead developer, got the Section 8 contract reinstated, and secured a $20 million investment to rehabilitate the buildings, bringing them back into physical and financial health.

"This wasn't the first time residents had to organize to save their homes. During the 1980s, working with local organizations, the residents were successful in getting the project then known as Hunts Point 1 rehabilitated. But by 2007 conditions had degraded so severely that the tenants organized once again against the owner with accusations of gross mismanagement and graft.

"Tenants suffered through a complete dissolution of basic services - showers that were inoperable for months--and feared for their safety as the crime from the streets had easy access to tenants in their own homes. The buildings were in such poor financial shape that HUD began to foreclose. HUD and the original project funders acknowledged that although the buildings had been fully rehabilitated 20 years earlier, they required yet another major rehab to be livable again.

"The project's unique challenges added to the complexity of problems during the rehabilitation. The challenges started at the foreclosure auction in February 2008, where tenants and organizers waved signs to ward off predatory purchasers interested in picking up the properties on the cheap and de-commissioning the Section 8 contract. The strategy worked and a partnership of MHANY Management and South Bronx-based CDC Nos Quedamos was the successful bidder.

"However, the day after they took title in April 2008, the Section 8 contract was terminated due to degraded building conditions. Rent collections dropped from an average Section 8 rent of $900/unit/month to just the $100/unit/month tenant contribution.

"Additionally, 24 apartments were vacant and uninhabitable, further reducing the rent roll. With the building hemorrhaging money and no capital funds available to begin making improvements, MHANY worked during the summer of 2008 to secure funding while making emergency repairs, installing security cameras and holding regular tenant meetings in an effort to keep the tenants afloat.

"In September 2008 the project closed on over $20 million in financing, and MHANY proceeded over the next two years to relocate families within the complex on a building-by-building basis to overhaul the internal building systems and make overdue apartment repairs. By 2011, the buildings were unrecognizable forms of their former selves, a full rehab completed with tenants relocated temporarily within the complex during construction. These buildings serve once again as a bastion of affordable, safe and secure housing for the community."

MLRC's 5-step strategy for political support

Step 1: Get to know your local officials and their staff members: start by dropping MLRC newsletters at the offices of your elected officials.
Step 2: Personally stop by the offices occasionally.
Step 3: Ask to meet the community liaison for your neighborhood and the housing specialist (if they have one).
Step 4: Invite your local officials to your housing development. Invite them to a regular tenants association meeting to observe and speak briefly.
Step 5: Publicize this event in your development, through newsletters, posters, and online through blogs, Facebook, Twitter, etc.

Opposition grows to new garbage processing facility on Upper East Side

In spite of one lawsuit and another that may be in the wings, and in the face of both local and international studies showing adverse health effects on children of massive vehicular traffic, the City is insisting on moving forward with its plan to install an enormous garbage processing facility on the East River at East 91st Street.

Known as the Marine Transfer Station, the facility is expected to process 720 tons of residential waste and 780 tons of commercial waste daily, although it has been engineered to process more than three and a half times that amount. Even the lesser amount will entail average daily traffic of one hundred forty-three trucks going to and from the facility every day. This is in addition to normal auto traffic in the area.

The station will be near several public housing projects, as well as Metropolitan Hospital and about forty-five schools, churches and other houses of worship.

The key group fighting the plan is Residents for Sane Trash Solutions (Sane Trash), which commissioned a study that showed, among other things, that "the garbage trucks and fumes from the MTS will result in an 8% increase in respiratory-related child hospitalizations."

A completely separate study, done recently on health issues in ten European cities, found a serious cause and effect relationship between childhood asthma and auto traffic (see story page 2).

Residents are especially concerned that the waste disposal facility will be situated right next to the Asphalt Green recreation complex. On its own website, the complex stated that for twenty-four hours daily, six days a week, "more than a thousand garbage trucks will pass through the Asphalt Green community facility each week, where 31,000 children visit per year including children from public and private schools throughout the City.

"The proposed dump will be located next to DeKovats Playground, which was specifically designed for children under age five, as well as Asphalt Green's playing field. This creates a series of health and safety concerns including exposing children to up to 4,290 tons of trash per day, hazardous air pollutants and dangerous noise levels.

"Having a garbage dump in the heart of Asphalt Green's facility will endanger the lives of the thousands of children every day. Nearly 200 garbage trucks per day will use the dump's entrance ramp, which cuts through the center of the Asphalt Green campus and will pose a significant safety risk for the children and adults who have to walk across it to access the facilities."

As a result of its organizing efforts, Sane Trash reports almost eight thousand supporters. It has also announced its participation in Pledge 2 Protect (P2P), "a coalition of diverse citizens, organizations and businesses dedicated to protecting the health and safety of tens of thousands of New Yorkers by stopping the East 91st Street MTS."

Sane Trash has been promoting announcements from the World Health Organization regarding the carcinogenic properties of diesel exhaust. It also cites new emissions standards from the Environmental Protection Agency, "which the East 91st Street MTS would exceed," and a statement by the City's own Commissioner of Health that "vehicular emissions are harmful to children."

Support of the facility, however, has come from residents of north Brooklyn, especially the Greenpoint and Williamsburg neighborhoods.

A group calling itself Organization United for Trash and Environmental Equity for North Brooklyn, and another known as Newtown Creek Alliance, are arguing that the Marine Transfer Facility will ease trash disposal in Brooklyn, and is therefore a matter of "borough equity."

This view is hotly contested by Sane Trash. "Manhattan's residential waste is not trucked through any other borough of New York City and the construction and use of a new East 91st Street marine transfer station will not lessen the garbage load of other other boroughs," said the organization's Jed Garfield.

HUD grants $98 million across nation to combat lead paint and other hazards

Late in May, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) awarded $98.3 million in grants to thirty-eight local projects to protect children and families from the hazards of lead-based paint and from other home health and safety hazards.

The grant funding will clean up lead paint hazards and other health hazards in 6,373 high-risk homes, train workers in lead-safe work practices, and increase public awareness about childhood lead poisoning. Lead is a known toxin that can impair children's development and have effects lasting into adulthood.

"Childhood lead poisoning is completely preventable and that's exactly what these funds are designed to do," said HUD Deputy Secretary Maurice Jones in a release. "The communities receiving these grants are helping their children grow up brighter, safer and healthier."

"These grant awards demonstrate that a priority for HUD is providing healthy and safe homes for families and children," noted Jon L. Gant, Director of HUD's Office of Healthy Homes and Lead Hazard Control.

Even though lead-based paint was banned for residential use in 1978, HUD estimates that approximately twenty-four million homes still have significant lead-based paint hazards today. Lead-contaminated dust is the primary cause of lead exposure and can lead to a variety of health problems in young children, including reduced IQ, learning disabilities, developmental delays, and reduced height.

In New York State, grants were awarded to projects in Orange and Mahonic Counties, each for $2.5 million.

DeBlasio urges RGB to freeze rent levels

Bill DeBlasio, the city's public advocate who is running for Mayor, called on the Rent Guidelines Board to freeze increases at its next monthly meeting. In a statement released in May, he said "At a time when nearly half of our city's residents are living in or near poverty, we cannot continue to put additional financial burdens on poor and working New Yorkers. The Rent Guidelines Board must freeze rent increases when it meets next month. And I renew my call for the RGB to hold hearings in the five boroughs, instead of its one planned meeting in Manhattan. If the RGB's members could hear directly from the people, as I have, they would know we cannot place additional hardships on renters in New York."

An article in the NY Post on May 28 mis-stated DeBlasio's position, implying that he opposed a rent freeze.

New Ideas For Strengthening Federal Rental Assistance

By Reid Cramer and Jeffrey Lubell

With housing stability increasingly important for families under economic duress, additional rental funds could help to fund local housing authorities in order to assist families in need. New thinking could result in a plan aimed to help families get back into the mainstream, as well as place them on a path toward increased personal wealth.

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Tough economic times are straining what is already a maxed-out system of social services. Despite the attention being paid to beleaguered homeowners, renters are being squeezed as well. Since an increasing number of Americans simply earn too little to afford to rent a decent home, one vital element of our social net is the provision of rental housing assistance.

To help these families meet their basic needs for shelter, the federal government spends more than $25 billion a year through a mix of housing vouchers and direct subsidies to help about four million households. But the demand for such assistance is increasing as job loses spread and incomes fall.

Housing stability is critically important for ensuring the well being of families experiencing economic stress. For this reason, Congress should appropriate additional rental assistance funds to allow local housing authorities to assist more families in need.

At the same time, we believe the time is right to experiment with new ideas for strengthening federal rental assistance-especially ones that help families get back into the mainstream as quickly as possible.

One problem in particular should be addressed head-on. Existing program rules create an unintended barrier to increased earnings once families begin receiving assistance, undermining what could otherwise be a strong platform to help families make progress toward self-sufficiency.

Families receiving rental assistance currently pay 30 percent of their adjusted income to cover the costs of rent and utilities. This wisely ensures that families' rental payments do not consume a disproportionate share of their disposable income and that families with greater needs get more help. But as assisted families' earnings rise, their rent also increases, creating a likely disincentive for them to pursue jobs that would substantially raise their incomes.

To address this "incentives" problem while also expanding the number of families benefitting from assistance, we recommend providing all assisted families with a Rental Assistance Asset Account that grows as their earnings grow.

Build a Pool of Resources

Under our proposal, families would continue to pay 30 percent of their adjusted income for rent and utilities, but if their earnings go up, a portion of their increased rent payments would be placed into a personal account. The more they earn, the more their account would grow. Over time, they would build up a pool of resources that could be strategically deployed to advance their personal goals.

This could mean buying or fixing up a car, making a down payment on a home, investing in education or training, or facilitating a move away from assistance. This combination of increased earnings and increased savings—together with complementary services to help families overcome barriers to increased work effort—could help families prepare to access private-market housing, freeing up scarce resources for other qualifying families.

Bronx 'green' groups organize an urban farms tour

A group of Bronx organizations will host the third annual urban farm tour series, visiting some of the borough's amazing urban farms and community gardens. Participants will board a Bronx Trolley and meet community farmers as they tend to their plots of land; meet micro-entrepreneurs who raise bees and harvest honey; and see chickens that produce Bronx farm-fresh eggs. Each tour includes a healthful lunch, a lesson in agro-tourism, and entertainment. Tickets are $30; RSVP required. All proceeds go toward the support and programming of Bronx community gardens. To register or for more information, call 718-590-3518 or e-mail bronxfoodsummit@gmail.com. Saturdays, June 8, July 13, August 3, September 7, and October 12. Departure at 9 a.m. from midtown Manhattan, and return at 3 p.m.

Questions and answers on Mitchell-Lama

Tenants and cooperators are welcome to submit questions to: information@mitchell-Lama.org

Q: Can I put my new spouse on my apartment lease in a HCR Mitchell-Lama development?

A: No, so long as you remain in the unit. However, if you vacate the apartment, a family member may remain there under HCR's succession regulations. The relative must prove that the apartment has been his or her primary residence for the past two years (or one year for seniors and handicapped), or since the beginning of the tenancy, or since the beginning of the relationship.

Q: After a buyout, what will my rent be?

A: If your apartment was built before January 1, 1974, and is located either in NYC or Nassau, Westchester or Rockland counties, it will be subject to either the NYC rent stabilization law or the NYS Emergency Tenant Protection Act. In these situations, the regulatory agency will be HCR's Office of Rent Administration.

In other cases, the landlord has license to charge market rents, unless he or she accepts some other government subsidy program.

New affordable units slated for Landmarks Commission warehouse

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The project is one phase of the city's New Housing Marketplace Plan, an effort to finance 165,000 units of affordable housing for half a million New Yorkers by the end of the 2014 fiscal year. To date, according to HPD, "a total of 35,973 units have been financed in Brooklyn, with 3,044 of those units in Brooklyn Community District 1 where the warehouse project is being developed."