MITCHELL-LAMA RESIDENTS COALITION

Vol. 18, Issue 3
September 2013

WEBSITE: www.mitchell-lama.org

West Village Houses' tenants face impending market rents

Tenant residents of West Village Houses (WVH), a 420-unit former Mitchell-Lama complex of low rise buildings which opened in 1974, are facing possible free market rent increases in about five years.

The planned increases, unaffordable to most if not all of the seventy moderate- to middle-income tenants, are part of a deal worked out with the residents in 2002, when the complex was facing removal from the ML program.

As in many other ML developments facing removal, residents organized to combat the move; they eventually agreed to a proposal consisting of transforming West Village Houses into a non-eviction co-op, in which tenants could purchase their apartments at below-market rates. The City would contribute financing by forgiving about $19 million in interest on the mortgage loan. Those tenants who were unable or unwilling to buy were guaranteed the right to remain in their apartments, with rents rising roughly in step with rent stabilization. This right was secured by a 12-year contract as the courts ruled that WVH was not covered by the rent stabilization laws. All renters had the right to buy at a restricted price until 2016.

One resident was quoted as saying that initially, tenants paid little attention to the deadline because the overall focus was on the fact that the plan was, technically, non-eviction. Eventually, however, he and others realized that "this isn't a noneviciton; this is a delayed eviction."

Almost three-quarters of the tenants will reach retirement age at the 2018 deadline. Generally, household income declines during retirement.

Tenants have been in communication with City Council Speaker Christine Quinn's office. Quinn, a candidate for mayor, had been deeply involved in the original negotiations to keep WVH affordable.

The owner of the complex is BRG Realty, which acquired the property in 2007. On its website, BRG says that it "has cultivated deep expertise that enables the firm to identify attractive investments, execute efficient purchase and sale transactions, increase the value of portfolio properties . . . and structure profitable exit strategies for investors."

HPD's revised voucher standards spark fear of eviction among tenants

A notice from HPD on enhanced or "sticky" vouchers has sent waves of fear among tenants who hold such vouchers that their rents would either rise dramatically or they would face eviction. Although the fears may be overblown, some tenants, especially older people, may indeed have to move to smaller available apartments in their own developments, if any are available.

The July 22 notice said, in part, that as a result of federal fund cutbacks due to "sequestration," HPD is issuing new guidelines, and that tenant families currently occupying a unit that is "larger than your new voucher size" will be considered "overhoused." Under the new guidelines, a family may have only one bedroom/sleeping unit per tenant, so single tenants will have to relocate to a "zero bedroom"--a studio--or their vouchers will be

Continued on page 7

Inside this issue:

Strengthen MLRC
Join today (use form on page 2)

GENERAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING
SATURDAY, October 19, 2013

Time: 10:00 a.m. – 12:00 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

ANHD launches academy to train community organizers

The Association for Neighborhood and Housing Development has launched the NYC Organizing Academy, under the Center for Neighborhood Leadership, to provide formal training covering the history and theoretical frameworks of community organizing, among other issues.

The ten month course is designed for individuals currently active in their communities, and who are interested in supplemental formal training. Classes will cover models of effecting change, community organizing's relationship to other forms of community change work, the organized labor movement, electoral politics and social policy as well as information concerning best practices, self-care and career planning.

The course will meet for three hours, from 9 a.m. to 12 noon, on the second and fourth friday of each month starting in September, and will run through June of the following year for a total of 60 training hours.

In the first semester participants will work to develop a comprehensive framework for social change work. Participants will be exposed to a broad array of community change models and methodologies, and will also spend time devising individual sustainability plans to respond to work- and life-related pressures and prevent burnout.

The objective of the second semester is to further develop the tools and skills to use in day-to-day life as a community organizer. The sessions will focus heavily on the specific activities and strategies effective change agents employ to get results, as well as techniques to evaluate prior work to ensure better results in the future. The sessions will also help participants gain a clearer understanding of the social, economic and political context(s) in which we work.

The curriculum, from September 1, 2013 through January 2014, subject to change, is as follows:

Session 1. Orientation: Welcome to CNL

Session 2. Exploring Community Change Models

Session 3. Exploring Community Change Models Continued

Session 4. Essential Skills for Community Engagement

Session 5. Creating the Capacity to Effect Change (Part I)

Session 6. Creating the Capacity to Effect Change (Part II)

Session 7. Leadership Development & Relationship Building

Session 8. Self-Care for Sustainability

Session 9. Introduction to Campaign Planning and Strategy

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2013

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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, October 19, 2013

10:00 a.m. - Noon

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

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

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

NYCHA brakes, but doesn't stop, plan to lease public spaces for market rate housing

In the wake of stong community opposition to NYCHA's draft agency plan to lease public spaces in HA developments--parking lots, playgrounds, community centers, etc.--for luxury residences, the City and NYCHA held back on soliciting proposals from private developers. However, the agency will now request suggestions from the developers on how to proceed. Such "expressions of interest" will presumably be presented to the next mayor for action. Following are NYCHA's original executive summary, and comments by critics and opponents.

Plan NYCHA: Executive summary and leasing proposal

The New York City Housing Authority's priorities for fiscal 2014 include achieving fiscal stability in light of reduced federal funding, preserving NYCHA's public housing stock, expanding affordable housing opportunities, and improving customer service and the quality of life for NYCHA residents through operational efficiencies and the greening of public housing.

Plan NYCHA is a call to action to ensure that public housing remains available for current and future generations of New Yorkers. Despite facing unprecedented challenges – from overwhelming funding shortages, to an aging and decaying housing stock in desperate need of repair, to a growing wait list – NYCHA is leading the charge to meet these obstacles head on. We need to overcome these challenges together; only through sustained, meaningful collaboration can we ensure that this invaluable resource will not be diminished. With recognition that a major transformation is needed both within the NYCHA organization and throughout the supporting environment, we are calling on all public housing stakeholders – residents, policymakers, advocates, NYCHA staff, and New Yorkers at large – to join the fight to preserve New York City public housing.

Plan NYCHA is based on ten key imperatives:

1. Preserve the public and affordable housing asset
2. Develop new mixed-use, mixed-income housing and resources
3. Ensure financial stability
4. Expedite maintenance and repairs
5. Strengthen the frontline
6. Improve safety and security
7. Optimize apartment usage and ensure rental equity
8. Connect residents and communities to critical services
9. Excel in customer service
10. Create a high-performing NYCHA.

NYCHA serves nearly 630,000 public housing residents and Section 8 recipients across the five boroughs. With 179,000 apartments in 2,600 buildings, NYCHA is the largest public housing authority in the nation. Our portfolio of properties—most of which were developed in the 1940s to 1960s—is a valuable resource to the families we serve. But NYCHA's funding has declined substantially over the years, failing to keep pace with the growing needs of our aging infrastructure. NYCHA's operations budget has been underfunded by $750 million over the past decade. On the capital side, NYCHA has had its annual funding cut by 35% since 2001–for a total cumulative loss of $875 million.

NYCHA's unmet capital needs will more than double to $13.4 billion over the next five years. To address critical building repairs such as new roofs, elevators and heating system upgrades, NYCHA must reinvest in itself. Leasing our land for new building development, which has the potential to generate more than $1 billion of capital funding, is one of the most important tools we have to help confront the funding challenges NYCHA faces and preserve public housing.

NYCHA's proposed plan would lease – not sell – 14 parcels of land located within eight developments to private developers who would finance, construct, and operate the new residential buildings. The income generated through land leases would be dedicated to building improvements at the eight developments and other public housing properties citywide. Approximately 80% of the apartments would be market rate and no less than 20% of apartments would be permanently affordable to low-income residents.

The Plan will:

Not increase rent for NYCHA residents as a result of the new building development.

Not demolish public housing apartments.

Not displace NYCHA families.

Not privatize any NYCHA public housing – NYCHA will still be the landlord

Not sell NYCHA land; NYCHA will own the land under the new buildings.

Not result in job losses or increased work requirements for NYCHA personnel.

Many blast NYCHA's plan to lease public spaces for luxury units

At the final NYCHA meeting, residents and officials spoke out against the plan, in particular imperative 2 on leasing public spaces for luxury development.

"We have been steamrolled," said Carmen Negron, a resident of the Lower East Side's Baruch Houses for the past 43 years. She added that she and others fear the plan is an opening wedge, bringing the HA "one step closer to going private and [residents] being homeless."

According to the plan, so-called underutilized space is available at Campos Plaza in the East Village; the Washington Houses and Carver Houses in Harlem; the Frederick Douglass Houses on the Upper West Side; and the Smith Houses, LaGuardia Houses, Meltzer Tower and Baruch Houses on the Lower East Side.

Opposition also came from several elected officials and mayoral candidates. Among their arguments was that NYCHA could finance much-needed repairs "if the city stopped charging the agency extra money for basic services such as sanitation and policing," according to one report. NYCHA residents already pay for these services through their taxes.

"If NYCHA can recapture over $100 million annually — double the amount projected to be generated by the infill under the most optimistic of scenarios — this money can be reinvested in frontline repairs and critical upgrade," Councilwomen Margaret Chin, Rosie Mendez and Melissa Mark-Viverito wrote in a joint statement at the public hearing.

Also at the meeting, the NYC Alliance to Preserve Public Housing, a collaboration of resident leaders and organizations, housing advocates, and elected officials, presented a statement in which they argued, among other points, that "NYCHA must halt the infill land-lease plan."

Members include Citizens Committee for Children of New York City, Employees Union Local 237, International Brotherhood of Teamsters, Community Service Society (CSS), Community Voices Heard (CVH), Families United for Racial and Economic Equality (FUREE),Good Old Lower East Side (GOLES), and numerous others.

Rangel, fighter for rights, affordable housing, wins MLRC appreciation award

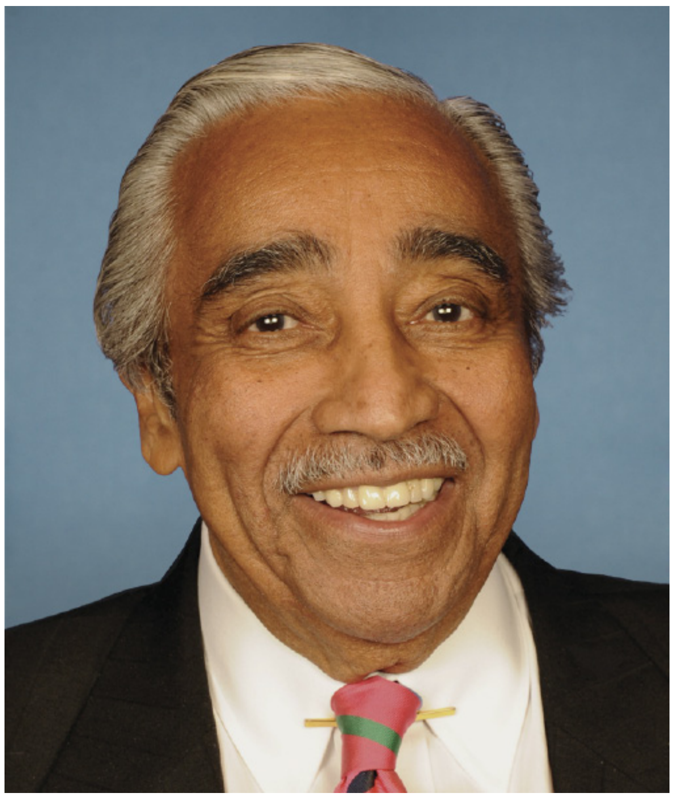

Photo: Carl Glassman

Left: Congressman Charles B. Rangel. Right: MLRC appreciation award. Below: attendees at MLRC June 2013 general membership meeting addressed by Rangel.

By Sonja Maxwell

Congressman Charles B. Rangel, co-founder of the MLRC, received an appreciation award at the organization's June 15, 2013 general membership meeting, at which he was warmly and enthusiastically welcomed.

Rangel, who represents New York's 13th Congressional District, was the first African-American to chair the House Ways and Means Committee, and was a founding member of the Congressional Black Caucus.

In his usual frank and pointed style, he discussed issues ranging from voting rights to women's rights, civil rights to affordable housing.

On voting rights, he urged the assembly, and by extension everyone else, to be vigilant, especially in light of recent voter restriction laws enacted in various states. "All politics are local," he noted, emphasising the importance of working to overturn the restrictive laws, which largely undermine the right to vote by people of color. This can be accomplished, he said, by self-education, getting to the polls, and encouraging young people as well to vote. "We have come too far to turn the clock back."

He also touched on housing, reiterating his commitment to keeping our neighborhoods affordable.

On women's reproductive rights, he mentioned how they as well are coming under attack. Choice should be made by a woman and her doctor, he said, and not by any state.

At the end of his presentation he was given a standing ovation, and then presented with a plaque by MLRC's Co-Chair Jackie Peters. The plaque read "With deep appreciation and sincere thanks for your continued support of the fight for justice and affordable housing for all New Yorkers."

Photo: Carl Glassman

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
- Lindville Housing
- Lincoln Amsterdam House
- Manhattan Plaza
- Marcus Garvey Village
- Masaryk Towers Tenant Association
- Meadow Manor
- Michangelo Apartments
- 109th St. Senior Citizen Plaza
- 158th St. & Riverside Dr. Housing
- 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

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.

Senate OKs Squadron bill to widen M-L access to mid-income families

The NY State Senate passed legislation introduced by Sen. Daniel Squadron to make the Mitchell-Lama Housing Program accessible to more middle income families, by allowing more to pay a rental surcharge. Having passed the Assembly earlier in June, the bill is awaiting action by Gov. Cuomo.

A statement released by Squadron's office noted that "Current law stipulates that families with two or more dependents -- whose joint annual net income exceeds 100% but is below 125% of average median income (AMI) -- are eligible for Mitchell-Lama housing if they pay a rental surcharge. But by making this allowance available only to families with dependents, many families are excluded simply because they don't have children."

This requirement is eliminated under the Squadron bill. Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver sponsored the bill in that house; it was co-sponsored by Assemblymember Joan Millman. Silver said that by "eliminating the dependents requirement, M-L housing developments become accessible to "a greater number of families regardless of whether they have dependents -- allowing families with a broader range of income levels and family compositions than are currently eligible to become part of the Mitchell-Lama community."

Silver also noted that "For nearly 60 years Mitchell-Lama housing has provided individuals and families with the stability needed to build strong and prosperous communities. This legislation advances our commitment to affordable housing and makes the program more accessible to a greater number of New Yorkers."

In November, board members representing twenty-three Mitchell-Lama properties from around the city met with Squadron to discuss the maximum income eligibility levels.

Squadron noted that he himself has been a Mitchell-Lama resident for over 25 years. "I can tell you that the program originally intended for middle-income New Yorkers, teachers, nurses, city workers, over time fell far from its original goal because the program does not make allowances for inflation or cost of living increases as it pertains to income eligibility," he said.

Luxury developers face state inquiry over political donations and tax breaks

Five of New York State's most prominent developers of luxury housing received subpoenas under the century-old Moreland Act, which allows for the investigation of corruption in government agencies, for possible links between legislation offering them tax breaks and their donations to various politicians.

Three of the developers, named in a recent Wall Street Journal article, are Silverstein Properties, Extell Development and Thor Equities. Two others, named by various sources, are Fisher Brothers and Friedman Management.

The planned luxury developments are in some of the city's highest priced areas, including Park Place, West 57th Street, Fifth Avenue, Trinity Place, and Nassau Street.

Of concern to the Moreland Comission, created a year ago, is that the five buildings are included in legislation offering credits for significant tax abatements. Normally, construction in areas that are highly dense are prohibited from using the credits. The legislation was sponsored by State Senator Marty Golden (Rep., Cons., Ind.) of Brooklyn.

In a related development, Common Cause conducted a study in early August of the Real Estate Board of New York's political contributions.

In a statement, the advocacy group said that "the State Senate is the top target of REBNY money and that the overwhelming majority flows to lawmakers who represent districts outside of New York City: Since 2011, REBNY and its leadership have given $3.2 million to candidates and committees in the State Senate. Over 73% of contributions to candidates went to districts outside of New York City. Similarly, over $2.4 million (75%) went to Senate Republicans. By comparison, Senate Democrats received $500,000 while the four-member Independent Democratic Conference received $308,000."

The group also noted that "Our analysis shows a skillful and calculated manipulation of all of the weaknesses in New York State's campaign finance laws by New York City's real estate industry, which uses every trick in the book to insure that the investment they make in plentiful campaign contributions garners an extraordinarily large return at the expense of New York City's tenants and taxpayers."

City's shelter policy results in evictions to make way for homeless families

There's a new wrinkle developing in the decades-long real estate practice of pressuring moderate and middle income tenants to leave their apartments to make way for high income tenants: today, in various sections of the city, landlords are pushing out market rate tenants to make way for--the homeless?

Hard to believe, but it's happening. The reason, aired in August on WNYC News, is that the Bloomberg Administration is offering to pay owners whopping amounts for even violation-filled buildings to house the overflow of homeless individuals and families. By law, the City must provide shelter to anyone asking for it. Because the number of homeless families has been increasing dramatically (due to general economic conditions and the Bloomberg Administration's decision to cut off assistance to them several years ago), those requesting shelter have also soared. "The numbers of people in shelters have shot up since 2011," the report noted, "when state- and city-funded programs designed to help people move into permanent housing were eliminated."

As traditional shelters fill up, the City has turned to landlords in low-income areas, offering to pay them well in excess of what the landlords ordinarily receive: City payments amount to around $3,000 a month, far higher than market rents.

One consequence for the regular low income tenants is that they are now being pressured to leave to make way for the homeless. Ironically, given the dearth of affordable private housing, as these rent-paying tenants are forced to leave, they too will become homeless!

According to the Coalition for the Homeless, around 2,500 apartments are now being leased for those without homes.

One building in which long time tenants are being pressured to leave "has 215 housing code violations," the report said. "The more serious ones are for things like mold, water leaks, broken plaster and roach infestations. Tenants also complain that the building is chaotic and that bloody fights break out frequently."

The City's Department of Housing Preservation and Development has said it does not tolerate evictions except for serious lease violations. That is small comfort to tenants who receive frivolous eviction notices, and even less for those who must put up with the severe lack of maintenance.

Manufactured housing deserves a second look

By Doug Ryan

"Manufactured housing is not, and has not been for decades, mobile trailers that devalue a neighborhood and lock people into poverty. It's housing that can appreciate, blend into existing and planned neighborhoods and become a meaningful part of a region's housing assets. And it is less expensive, less wasteful and quicker to develop than other housing options."

Although this article focuses on single family homes, manufactured or modular housing is also being utilized for multi-family buildings, as in Brooklyn's Atlantic Yards project which, because of financial savings, will allow for more affordable units.

Recent housing trends should focus advocates on a very significant problem: the declining home ownership rate.

Investor-driven price increases, reduced affordable inventory, depressed incomes and larger homes have helped move homeownership out of reach for many Americans. Coupled with uncertainties in the mortgage market due to increased credit scrutiny and potential GSE reform, a perfect storm has scattered potential homebuyers.

I agree with recent reports, such as that of the National Association of Realtors, which suggest that the decline in new homeowners is due to the lack of affordable inventory. Inventory is regional and price-based. If you can't afford the available housing stock in the community where you hope to live, there's a shortage. But the shortage has a number of drivers, some of which have not been fully explored.

There is a solution, albeit a partial one, that many buyers, advocates and policymakers have overlooked.

The New York Times recently reported that investors, who are relatively new to the single-family market, are buying up homes to rent out, raising prices in certain markets. In California and Florida, for example, investors bought 25 percent to 33 percent of the homes in 2012. These two states, hard hit by both the mortgage crisis and the Great Recession, have had a huge stock of low-cost houses, but potential owner-occupiers have had little chance against all-cash investors.

Yet the hope is that as the employment pictures in both states improve, more individual homebuyers will enter the market. It appears, however, that the disconnect between prices and incomes may be squeezing families out of the market. This is happening in housing markets across the country.

While interest rates remain low, declining wages and other factors hinder a family's ability to buy a home. Home prices have climbed much faster than incomes. In the 12 months ended April 2013, existing home prices rose to $193,000, an increase of 11 percent. According to the census, new home prices rose by nine percent in 2012, up to $292,200. And new homes, including both single-family and for-sale multifamily homes, are larger than ever, according to that same census report. As homes become larger, they become even more unaffordable. Excluding land costs, new homes now cost $86.30 per square foot, the most since 2008. Multiplying more dollars times more square feet equals more unaffordable housing.

In a national housing market of over 132 million units, devising a viable housing is a herculean task. There is an opportunity, perhaps, to build on an existing housing platform to help address inventory and affordability issues in many local markets: manufactured housing.

Manufactured Housing in a New Light

Many advocates and policy makers, as well as lenders and investors, have an unfair, antiquated view of manufactured housing. To get to the point, manufactured housing is not, and has not been for decades, mobile trailers that devalue a neighborhood and lock people into poverty. It's housing that can appreciate, blend into existing and planned neighborhoods and become a meaningful part of a region's housing assets. And it is less expensive, less wasteful and quicker to develop than other housing options.

'The disconnect between prices and incomes may be squeezing families out of the market'

Manufactured housing costs about half of what site-built units cost. In 2012, for example, after subtracting land costs, manufactured homes cost about $44 per square foot; site-built, as noted above, costs over $86.

And since the typical new manufactured home shipped in 2012 was 1,475 square feet, about 60 percent the size of a new home, advocates and others should see how this smaller, less costly housing type can open the door to homeownership for tens of thousands of families who quite simply have been locked out of the resurgent housing marketplace.

The manufactured housing market is far from perfect. Chattel, or personal property, loans dominate the financing of these homes, even in cases where the home is titled as real estate or is sited on private property (as opposed to in a community or "park"). A chattel loan can add hundreds of dollars to a monthly payment, reducing the asset-building potential of homeownership, and reducing the owner's ability to pay down the loan.

Our organization, the Corporation for Enterprise Development (CFED) is working with partners to improve financing and titling options for buyers. More competition in financing is better for everyone.

Other challenges loom, too. If the family owns the unit but has no control over the land beneath the home, then they are threatened by retaliation, unfair lot rent increases and even eviction without cause. CFED and other advocates are also focused on improving owner control of these communities.

Advocates need to look at manufactured housing in a new light, because it deserves it. Since 1976, when HUD began to regulate the industry, industry has developed better, more efficient and more attractive manufactured homes.

Manufacturers suffered badly in the early part of the century for a number of reasons, some of which presaged the larger mortgage meltdown, but the sector seems poised for something of a comeback. No doubt these companies would welcome a healthy dialogue with affordable housing advocates.

A template to improve homeownership is out there to see. We just need to look again.

The above article was posted on Shelterforce Rooflines blog page June 20, 2013, and is reprinted here with permission. Shelterforce is an online publication of the National Housing Institute. [http://www.rooflines.org/3271/manufactured_housing_deserves_a_second_look/]

HPD's revised voucher standards spark fear of eviction among tenants

Continued from page 1

changed from enhanced or "sticky" vouchers to less valuable regular vouchers.

In effect, this implies that tenants who refuse to move will have to pay an increase in rent, because the US government pays less for regular vouchers.

For many tenants holding vouchers, particularly the elderly, the note was wrongly interpreted as if it were an ultimatum: move now to a smaller unit, or lose your enhanced voucher--which allows them to stay at their complex--in exchange for a regular voucher, which could require them to leave their homes and seek out another apartment in the hope that some landlord would accept them. In New York City today, that option amounts to eviction--and often homelessness.

In an accompanying Notice of Overhoused Status, HPD said that "If your contract rent is higher than the payment standard you will be responsible to pay the difference between the two in addition to your tenant share; this is likely to result in a significant increase in your share of rent."

At Independence Plaza North, a fomer Mitchell-Lama development on Manhattan's lower west side, many tenants feared that their rents would soar or that they would face eviction.

To stem the panic, leaders of the tenants association, IPNTA, explained that while HPD has the right to revise its standards, the agency can only require the tenant to move if a smaller apartment becomes available and is offered to the tenant.

Studios disappearing

In fact, they explained, over the past few years, the owners, including mega-landlords Laurence Gluck and Vornado Realty Trust, have been converting many studios to tiny one-bedrooms (and converting one bedrooms to tiny two-bedrooms), which enables them to charge ever higher market rents.

"The HPD letter is full of errors and omissions," explained Diane Lapson, president of the tenants association, IPNTA. She added that if a studio does become available, some tenant may have to move. But at present, "no one is facing eviction," she explained.

At other complexes, however, tenants may be in a more precarious situation. At Knickerbocker Plaza, a former Mitchell Lama at East 92nd Street and Second Avenue, for example, studios and one-bedrooms are the norm. The complex, built in 1975, now houses many older tenants. Unless they qualify for exemptions, some may well face the requirement to move or see their vouchers changed--forcing a rent increase. The increase will be the difference between what the new voucher will pay and a "Reasonable Market Rent" to be determined by HPD.

Nadler, pols, challenge HPD

In a September 4 letter to HPD, Congressman Jerrold Nadler and nine of his colleagues in the New York Congressional delegation sent a letter to HPD expressing concerns about the changes. The letter noted that "these changes ask those with the least to sacrifice the most."

"We are concerned about recent changes to the administration of the New York City Department of Housing Preservation & Development's (HPD) Section 8 Housing Voucher Program. Recently, thousands of Section 8 voucher holders received a letter from HPD, dated July 22, 2013, informing them of policy changes to the agency's Section 8 program. HPD explained in the letter that it implemented the changes as a result of funding cuts caused by the Federal Budget Control Act of 2011. We urge the agency to carefully consider all other available alternatives before implementing these changes."

It went on to say that "By reducing HPD's subsidy and payment standards, some families will experience a significant increase in their monthly rent share, forcing them to choose between putting food on the table and paying their rent. In addition, HPD's decision to reduce the subsidy standard based on the number of people living in a home will require many families to move placing additional costs and burdens on those already struggling to get by."

"We are also concerned with how HPD informed our constituents and our offices of these policy changes. HPD did not provide advanced notice to tenants' groups, community organizations or elected officials about the changes, causing a great deal of confusion for tenants. In addition, the July 22nd letter to tenants failed to clarify which policies would impact Enhanced Voucher recipients and which would impact Regular Section 8 Voucher recipients, leaving tenants, community leaders, and elected officials with many unanswered questions. We ask that in the future, HPD reach out to the communities affected by major policy changes before they are implemented to avoid such confusion."

Besides Nadler, the letter was signed by Reps. Yvette Clarke, Joseph Crowley, Eliot Engel, Hakeem Jeffries, Carolyn Maloney, Gregory Meeks, Grace Meng, José Serrano, and Nydia Velázquez.

In a separate letter to HPD, Councilmember Gale Brewer made some of the same points. She asked why the agency was enacting such serious changes without holding public hearings. In response, HPD said it had sent notices to various classes of voucher holders, requesting their views, and was exploring alternate sources of funding.

NLIHC on Obama's housing address: 'scant attention' to needs of tenants

Text of National Low Income Housing Coalition's president on Obama's address

Today [August 23] President Barack Obama gave a speech on housing that largely focused on helping middle class families become or remain homeowners. He laid out common sense principles that should guide federal policy and the practices of the housing finance industry. The President commended the Senators who are working on a bipartisan plan to wind down and replace Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac. He called for the swift confirmation by the Senate of Representative Mel Watt (D-NC) to be the Director of the Federal Housing Finance Agency, which the National Low Income Housing Coalition heartily supports.

Unfortunately, the President gave scant attention to the housing needs of the one-third of Americans who are renters. A balanced housing policy requires that the housing that someone rents is understood to be his or her home as much as the housing that someone buys.

While the President mentioned the need for more investment in affordable rental housing, missing from the speech was any reference to the 7.1 million unit shortage of rental housing that the lowest income families can afford, and the struggle that low wage workers and people on fixed incomes have just to come up with the rent each month.

The President's only comment on homelessness was about homeless veterans, who are extremely deserving of assistance, but make up a small fraction of the homeless population.

A truly comprehensive housing

Continued on page 8

Poor housing quality found key cause of children's emotional problems

Substandard housing is by far the most significant indicator of psychological stress and acting-out behavior among children, according to a newly released brief by the MacArthur Foundation.

Authors of the brief, which was based on their study for *Developmental Psychology*, found that housing quality, more so than stability, affordability, ownership or receiving rental assistance, was key to understanding chidren's emotional well being.

"Children exposed to homes with leaking roofs, broken windows, rodents, nonfunctioning heaters or stoves, peeling paint, exposed wiring, or unsafe or unclean environments," the study noted, "experienced greater emotional and behavioral problems. Housing quality also was related to school performance for older children, with adolescents in poorer quality homes showing lower reading and math skills in standardized achievement tests."

Residential instability was a lesser, but still important, factor.

The study found that "The stress and strain of living in poor quality homes or having to move multiple times in a few short years took its toll, leading to symptoms of depression and anxiety, and to less stable family routines. This in turn helped to explain children's diminished functioning."

Unaffordability, however, "had little discernible link to children's well-being."

The brief is available at *http://www.macfound.org/media/files/HHM_Policy_Research_Brief_-_Sept_2013.pdf*

Rental discrimination widespread against same-sex couples: HUD

Housing discrimination against same-sex couples is widespread, a counterpoint to recent political gains made by the LGBT community. In a major study prepared for the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, opposite-sex couples were far more likely than gay or lesbian couples to receive positive responses to e-mail inquiries regarding rentals advertised online.

In New York City and New York State, housing discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation is outlawed. That does not mean, however, that such discrimination does not exist.

The HUD study found that same-sex couples are significantly less likely than heterosexual couples to get favorable responses to e-mail inquiries about electronically advertised rental housing.

The research was based on 6,833 e-mail correspondence tests conducted in 50 metropolitan markets across the United States from June through October 2011. For each correspondence test, two e-mails were sent to the housing provider, each inquiring about the availability of the unit advertised on the Internet. The only difference between the two e-mails was the sexual orientation of the couple making the inquiry.

Comparing gross measures of discrimination, heterosexual couples were favored over gay male couples in 15.9 percent of tests and over lesbian couples in 15.6 percent of tests. The net measures indicated that heterosexual couples are significantly more likely than their gay male and lesbian counterparts
to receive an initial e-mail response.

At this preliminary stage of the rental housing transaction, barriers indicate a rejection of the tester based solely on the sexual orientation nformation provided in the e-mail rather than on any characteristics related to qualification for the housing, thus preventing basic access to rental units.

According to HUD, the study is only a first step in understanding the level of discrimination experienced by lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people. In the near future, HUD will initiate an in-person testing study for lesbian, gay, and transgender renters, expected to be complete in 2015.

Key findings of current study

- Same-sex couples experience discrimination in the online rental housing market, relative to heterosexual couples.
- Adverse treatment is found primarily in the form of same-sex couples receiving fewer responses to the e-mail inquiry than heterosexual couples.
- Overall--and ironically--results in states with legislative protections show slightly more adverse treatment for gay men and lesbians than results in states without protections.

The study was prepared in May 2013 for U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Office of Policy Development

HA tenants across city rally against fiscal hits on public housing

Residents of public housing communities from across the city, together with the support of citywide labor unions and various housing advocacy groups and City Council members, rallied at noon on June 25, 2013, on the steps of New York's City Hall to denounce the fiscal and policy assault on public housing in general, and on its seniors and youths in particular, by Mayor Bloomberg and the management of the New York City Housing Authority.

The residents also demanded restoration of budget cuts, full funding for public housing at the city, state and federal levels, and inclusion and consultation in all deliberations affecting the funding and administration of public housing in the city, in compliance with federal regulations.

An advisor to the tenants, John deClef Piñeiro, said that a video of the rally "is a record of the message that was delivered to all elected officials that public housing residents are quite aware of their significant electoral power and that they will exercise that power to decide, in the primary and general elections, who advocates and legislates on their behalf." The video can be seen at *https://www.dropbox.com/sh/ouxadvsebbxol8p/vghPz27DEB?n=127899387#/*

Additional articles on NYCHA appear on page 3.

NLIHC on Obama's housing address: 'scant attention' to needs of tenants

Continued from page 7

speech would have called on Congress to pass a HUD budget for the next fiscal year that preserves the existing low income housing programs we have and restores funding for the HUD programs that have been decimated by the budget cuts and sequestration.

A speech that could have spoken to all Americans would have called for funding for the only viable solution to the affordable rental housing shortage– the National Housing Trust Fund.

Decent, affordable, and secure homes are fundamental to family and community life, regardless of income, race, age, disability, and geography. I know that President Obama understands this. I would like to hear him say it more often.