



MITCHELL-LAMA RESIDENTS COALITION

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Summer 2020

WEBSITE: www.mitchell-lama.org

MLRC holds first membership meeting, via Zoom, since onset of Covid-19

The first general membership meeting of MLRC since the Corona virus exploded all over the world was held on July 19 via the popular online or virtual meeting app known as Zoom.

The group's members were notified of the meeting by postcard. As a result, dozens of ML residents called in. MLRC hopes to expand its email database for future notifications, and is asking residents to send their email addresses to info@mitchell-lama.org.

The July meeting opened with a moment of silence in remembrance of New York affordable housing advocate Tom Waters, Congressman John Lewis, and all the victims of the Corona virus.

After Co-chair Ed Rosner gave a legislative report, he explained that MLRC has had to suspend print production of this newsletter during the pandemic. However, an electronic version is in the works, and will be available at the MLRC website (as are all previous editions).

Among the attending elected officials, NY State Senator Luis Sepulveda of the Bronx, fearful of impending evictions, urged rental tenants to apply as soon as possible to the Covid Rental Assistance Program. He also urged all New Yorkers to

fill out the Census so that our state can get the money it deserves and keep as many representatives as possible. The Senator also updated the group on the legislative session expected that occurred the week of July 20.

Manhattan Borough President Gale Brewer also urged everyone to fill out the 2020 Census. She reported on her work to provide food to the neediest residents, described the Open Streets program, and urged us all to support our local mom and pop stores. She has been working with our ML neighbors at 65 West 96th Street.

Warren Harding, Chair of the Mitchell-Lama United Steering Committee, reported on the newly-formed Mitchell-Lama United. (See story page 2). Formed in February, this umbrella group has been working on the preservation of the M-L housing stock. With weekly meetings, the Steering Committee has produced position papers for distribution to elected officials and housing advocates.

Reports were presented on Atlantic Plaza Towers and Rochdale Village. The owners of Atlantic Plaza Towers, a former ML rental, sent each resident a letter explaining how to apply for the Covid Rental Assistance Program, because it benefits both the residents and the owner.

Extended eviction relief for NYS tenants during Covid-19 restrictions

Tenants in New York State who find it difficult or impossible to pay their rent during the Covid-19 pandemic will not face eviction while the pandemic lasts, even if the previous moratorium lapsed.

Under a new law signed by the governor in July, the moratorium will continue so long as the virus-related restrictions are in effect. To protect themselves, tenants will have to claim financial hardship deriving from the pandemic.

However, the new law, the Tenant Safe Harbor Act, does not stop landlords from seeking evictions of tenants who owe previous rents. Those back rents will still have to be paid, after the crisis is over.

The law was sponsored by Senators Brad Hoylman and Liz Krueger and Assembly member Jeffrey Dinowitz.

Prior to passage of the new law, a federal judge dismissed a landlord lawsuit seeking to end the NYS eviction moratorium on the grounds that it violated the owners' due process. The judge ruled that the court could not hear the case because the moratorium did not completely end the obligation of tenants to pay rent.

In July Democratic legislators advocated for three bills to further rent and mortgage aid for tenants and homeowners, and eviction and foreclosure relief. See story page 4.

Strengthen MLRC
Join today (use form on page 2)

MLRC **General Membership Meeting**

Note: During the Covid-19 pandemic, the next meeting will be held online via Zoom. Members will be informed by regular mail

CONTACT: Info@mitchell-lama.org

Mitchell-Lama Residents Coalition
PO Box 20414
Park West Station
New York, NY 10025

New Mitchell-Lama advocacy group forms to coordinate lobbying and protection efforts

A new coalition of three Mitchell-Lama organizations has formed to strengthen advocacy efforts on behalf of M-L residents.

The new group, Mitchell-Lama United, which came into being in February, will not replace any of the three founding members: Mitchell-Lama Residents Coalition, Brooklyn Mitchell-Lama Task Force, and Cooperators United for Mitchell-Lama. Rather it will coordinate lobbying and information efforts designed to "advocate for the shared objective of

preserving and protecting our Mitchell-Lama developments," according to a statement prepared by the group.

Among its initial efforts will be the preparation of a "white paper" (i.e., a "best way to proceed") on legislative and policy recommendations; securing support from state and local representatives; and protecting M-L residents from the Covid-19 pandemic.

The group welcomes new members. Anyone seeking to join is invited to send an email to mitchelllamaunited@gmail.com

Three tenant advocates unseat incumbent Dem Assembly members

Three Democratic tenant advocates unseated long time incumbents in the New York State Assembly in the July primaries, continuing a trend of victorious progressive candidates that began last year with the victories of four insurgent Democratic congresswomen (Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez of New York, Ilhan Omar of Minnesota, Ayanna Pressley of Massachusetts, and Rashida Tlaib of Michigan.)

Marcella Mitaynes upset Félix Ortiz in Brooklyn's 51st District; Emily Gallagher defeated incumbent Joseph Lentol in the borough's 50th District; and Phara Souffrant Forrest ousted Walter Mosley in the 57th District. Together the three districts represent the neighborhoods of Red Hook, Sunset Park, Greenpoint, Williamsburg, Clinton Hill and Crown Heights.

Gallagher, 36, served on the borough's Community Board 1. In addition to her tenant

organizing, she founded the Greenpoint Sexual Assault Task Force, and was endorsed by Progressives Cynthia Nixon and Zephyr Teachout.

Mitaynes, backed by the Democratic Socialists of America, immigrated to the USA from Peru as an indigenous native. She told NY1 that she recalls watching in fear as scores of neighbors in her building in Sunset Park, where she had been living since the age of five, were evicted in 2006. She soon became involved with a local community organization.

Phara Souffrant Forrest, also backed by the Democratic Socialists of America, is a 31-year-old nurse from Crown Heights. In her run for office, she focused heavily on tenants rights, and refused "special interest" donations according to an interview with New York Carib News. She supports the NY Health Act, which calls for Medicare for all, and the Good Cause Eviction Bill which calls for universal rent control.

UPCOMING EVENTS

MLRC General Membership Meeting

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CONTACT: Info@mitchell-lama.org

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INDIVIDUAL: \$15 per year; DEVELOPMENT: 25 cents per apt
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Current ML: Co-op _____ Rental _____

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Development _____

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, NY 10025

West Village Houses finalizes co-op privatization process

One of the last bastions of affordable cooperatives in New York City has become a free market cooperative, as the residents of West Village Houses completed a process to transform their development from affordable to market rate housing.

The final move, which entailed closing of a process started in 2018, when the development's tax abatement policy ended, was finalized in June 2020. (Actual planning for the change began in 2004, as tenants organized to retain as much of the affordable units as possible.)

The complex, which began life as a Mitchell-Lama tenant development, consists of 418 walkup apartments spread out over 42 buildings in Manhattan's West Village. The push for construction of the complex, which began in 1972, was largely led by Jane Jacobs, the legendary nonprofessional urban planner who spent much of her life battling for people-friendly environments, and fighting the encroachment of luxury high rise developments and inner city highways.

In 2002, residents organized in response to the owners' plan to exit the M-L

program. The tenants worked with the city to convert the complex to an affordable cooperative with funds from the Housing Development Fund Corp. The co-op then received lowered taxes and forbearance on repaying the mortgage owed by the original owner to the city.

An additional requirement agreed to by the new co-op owners was to keep a ceiling over purchase prices, so that the cooperators, who for decades benefitted from ML rent restrictions, could not "make a killing" on any sales. This provision was another effort to keep the complex reasonably affordable for future residents.

No more. The very location of West Village Houses virtually guarantees that sales prices will reach the stratosphere, when the economy, collapsed by the Covid-19 pandemic, recuperates.

But as resident Katy Bordonaro noted, "The housing is still affordable to the original tenants. And we are going to work to keep it that way but for the last two years, we have been stuck in limbo without a tax break and yet still under some of the restrictions."

Co-op City residents lead NYC in completing US census forms

In the United States, as of mid-May 2020, only around 60 percent of residents had completed the current census form. In New York City as a whole, the number is even lower—around 49 percent.

But in five adjacent districts in the Bronx, the count soars to 70 percent. And in two other adjacent tracts, the count is not far behind.

Those seven districts comprise the home of Co-op City, the largest cooperative housing complex in the world (15,000 apartments), constructed under the Mitchell-Lama program.

The issue is crucial, because the population count of an area—city, state, etc.—is a key factor in the allocation of billions of federal dollars, and in the number of seats in the House of Representatives.

So what accounts for the discrepancy in Census completion, especially in light of the fact that throughout the Bronx as a whole, the percentage of Census fillers is even lower than in the city?

"I think it's the nature of the people

who live in the cooperative," said George Torres, district manager of Community Board 12. "We are active federal, state, and municipal workers. The people who live here are the backbone of the unions representative of this great city."

Torres noted that the residents tend to be active in a variety of community struggles, as when the MTA sought to change long-established bus routes in the area, only to face intense opposition. Such collective endeavors, he said, tend to unite residents.

Other factors, such as religion, may also play a role. The Bronx Clergy Task Force, a unit of the borough president's office, had contacted twenty religious institutions to urge members to complete the Census form.

And a nonprofit group, African Communities Together, have manned phone banks to urge residents to do the same.

It helps that the group's members have mastered numerous foreign languages, including Afemi and Yoruba.

HUD moves rapidly to gut fair housing rules on ethnicity and gender

The Department of Housing and Urban Development has launched two new broadsides against the Obama Administration's efforts to promote fair housing for people of all ethnicities and colors and for transgender people.

In the first instance, HUD Secretary Ben Carson has removed a rule that required localities applying for federal aid to actively or "affirmatively" promote fair and integrated housing, that is, to add teeth to the 1968 Fair Housing Act, thereby preventing the resegregation of neighborhoods.

In the second case, it is proposing a rule to allow single-sex homeless shelters to reject transgender women.

Regarding ending affirmative efforts by states and localities, Carson originally justified eliminating the original Obama rule, which was first proposed two years ago, by saying that ending it would "reduce... the regulatory burdens of local jurisdictions," because the rule was "unworkable" and "a waste of time."

Today, however, a darker motive for eliminating the affirmative efforts rule is indicated: it is widely seen as a racist "dog whistle" to white suburbanites who President Trump feels would welcome efforts to prevent Black and Brown people from becoming their neighbors.

"I am happy to inform all of the people living their Suburban Lifestyle Dream that you will no longer be bothered or financially hurt by having low income housing built in your neighborhood..." he tweeted on July 29.

This tweet reinforces one of Trump's previous tweets, in which he said, referring to a New York Post article on ending the affirmative fair housing rule, that "The Suburban Housewives of America must read this article. [Joe] Biden [the presumptive Democratic candidate for President] will destroy your neighborhood and your American Dream. I will preserve it, and make it even better!"

Regarding discrimination on the basis of sex, HUD is proposing a new rule to allow managers of single-sex homeless shelters to bar transgender women, thereby gutting the Equal Access Rule passed under the Obama administration. The proposed rule would also allow the shelters to deny admission to anyone who the managers or employees *assume* might be transgendered, based upon "a range of factors" that might include, for example, how the individual dresses.

To justify the new rule, the Trump administration is arguing that it would protect women who are not transgendered from "men" who would enter the shelter to abuse them.

Advocates for transgendered people dispute that argument, arguing that the rule instead would force many transgendered women to live on the streets.

Bronx Botanical Gardens plans to build 450 affordable units

An additional stock of affordable housing units may be located in the near future on an unlikely location: a segment of the Bronx Botanical Gardens.

In February, media sources reported that the Gardens and a private developer have agreed to construct 450 below market rate apartments on the Garden's northwest corner, in the borough's Bedford Park section. A segment of those apartments will be set aside for the elderly.

However, the agreement was reached before the Covid-19 pandemic exploded. The virus, along with the ensuing economic shutdown, may well put those plans on hold.

Teaming up with Douglaston De-

velopment, the Gardens (also known as "the green space") has provided an acre of land currently housing several small commercial structures.

The project will start with the construction of 188 apartments for seniors who earn up to fifty percent of the area median income (AMI), which amounts to \$37,750 a year. An on-site social service agency, Fordham Bedford Community Services, will be available to the seniors.

That phase will be followed by the construction of another 260 units for families earning between thirty and one hundred thirty percent of AMI.

A current grocer, Cherry Valley, will occupy the ground floor, and will expand by 20,000 square feet.

DiNapoli: HPD failed to monitor M-L management firm's expenses

The City's Department of Housing Preservation and Development has failed to exercise proper oversight of a Mitchell-Lama management company in spite of a report two years ago that the company was derelict in its no-bid contracts, according to a report by State Comptroller Thomas DiNapoli.

In an audit released in June, DiNapoli found that HPD ignored two of the Comptroller's earlier recommendations, and only partially implemented the remaining four.

The company in question, RY Management, which manages Linden Plaza in Brooklyn, sought to increase tenants' rent by claiming cost overruns. But those costs were never fully monitored by HPD.

DiNapoli acknowledged that part of the problem is that contracts under \$10,000 do not require official approval or competitive bidding. But HPD also neglected to give "guidance" on how to deal with any contract under \$100,000, DiNapoli said.

RY spent \$10.7 million in no-bid contracts.

The comptroller also noted that RY was lax in insuring that costs from its contractors were "reasonable," and sufficient to warrant rent increases.

RY attempted to secure rent increases to offset its contract expenses, but the effort failed when HPD found inconsistencies in invoicing, untracked inventory and unmonitored transactions.

Covid-19 tip from a resident at RiverView: 'Workers: Wear booties as well as masks!'

The following suggestion was sent to the MLRC by a resident of RiverView Towers, a M-L development in Manhattan's Sutton Place neighborhood:

"Ask maintenance staff to put on paper booties (in addition to the mandatory masks) BEFORE entering an

apartment. Of course all wear masks. Since no one knows HOW Covid-19 is transmitted, asking maintenance workers to wear paper booties over their work shoes is a good suggestion for Mitchell-Lama residents, if not for everyone."

Albany Dems offer 3 bills for rent and mortgage relief

Democratic legislators in Albany are promoting three bills to further protect unemployed tenants and homeowners from rent and mortgage burdens and loss of homes while the Covid-19 business restrictions continue.

The bills would outlaw evictions and foreclosure proceedings for a full year after the pandemic ends; cancel both rent and mortgage payments while the crisis continues; and offer aid for homeless families seeking permanent housing.

Some 200,000 New York State residents lost their jobs during the peak of the crisis.

In May, the legislature allotted \$100 million to help the state's tenants pay rent through a voucher program, but as of July, the Division of Homes and Community Renewal has not released "guidance" for acquiring the funds, so no tenants have yet benefitted.



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

City issues draft proposal to promote housing fairness

A two-year effort to promote housing equity in New York City culminated in a draft of a mini-master plan released in June by Deputy Mayor for Housing and Economic Development Vicki Been.

The draft, "Where We Live," was accompanied by a call for additional public participation in responding to the contents, beyond those who participated earlier this year. In the introduction, the city noted that the draft combined "input from hundreds of residents and over 150 community-based and advocacy organizations with data from dozens of governmental agencies."

People wishing to comment may access the plan on social media using the hashtag #WhereWeLiveNYC. (The 200-plus page draft itself, with a guide to participation, can be accessed [here](https://bit.ly/3e3x-WWo) or at <https://bit.ly/3e3x-WWo>).

Written in English, Spanish, Chinese and three other languages, the draft consists of six major goals, each of which is accompanied by a series of strategies to accomplish it.

For example, to meet the first goal, that of combatting ongoing complex discrimination, the plan suggests the strategies of increasing testing to identify where the discrimination is taking place (e.g., which brokers and realtors are committing it), increasing city agency resources to handle public complaints, and exploring the possibility of new regulations.

The five other goals include:

- ¶ Facilitate equitable housing development in New York City and the region.
- ¶ Preserve affordable housing and prevent displacement of long-standing residents.
- ¶ Enable more effective use of rental

assistance benefits, especially in amenity-rich (i.e., more affluent) neighborhoods.

¶ Create more independent and integrated living options for people with disabilities.

¶ Make equitable investments to address the neighborhood-based legacy of discrimination, segregation, and concentrated poverty.

For the second goal of facilitating "equitable housing development" in both the city and the region, the draft suggests:

- Exploring opportunities to accelerate land use review and remove obstacles to the approval of affordable housing development, particularly in amenity-rich areas with limited affordable housing options;

- Supporting changes to New York State legislation that facilitate housing development, such as removing the state cap on residential floor area ratio;

- Reviewing the effect that historic districts have on the supply of housing at a range of incomes; exploring ways to balance the need for historic preservation with the need for new housing;

- Expanding the Housing Ambassadors program to provide direct assistance to residents navigating the affordable housing search and application processes, with a specific focus on outreach to residents using rental assistance;

- Expanding outreach and support services for the NYCHA Family Reentry Program, which reunites justice-involved New Yorkers with family members in NYCHA housing.

Strategies for the remaining goals appear under each goal.

CHIP: 25 % of NYC tenants skipped rent in May

Roughly a quarter of the city's residential tenants and two-thirds of ground floor retail tenants skipped their rent payments during May, a direct consequence of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The data was released by the Community Housing Improvement Program, or CHIP, which represents owners and managers of around four thousand rent regulated apartments.

On a nationwide level, the percent of residential tenants who were forced to skip rent payments was half that of New York—around twelve percent—according to a National Multifamily Housing Council report.

CHIP used the findings to plead for federal funds to compensate the owners for their loss of rent money. Jay Martin, the group's executive director, said that "Unless the federal government steps in to help renters and owners in a big way, we are going to see a housing disaster the likes of which we have never seen."

While rent collections in general—that is, regulated and unregulated units—were down fifteen to twenty percent, according to the Rent Stabilization Association, an owner-group, collections were up among tenants in regulated apartments who received Section 8 subsidies.

Sunnyside master plan: 12,000 affordable units, mass transit, park areas

A master plan that envisages the creation of around 12,000 affordable apartments, large areas of open park and urban space, minimum auto traffic with significant public transportation, all in the Sunnyside area of Queens, was released in March by the city's Economic Development Corp. (EDC), a non-profit that functions in many ways as a public agency.

Developed by the urban planning firm Practice for Architecture and Urbanism, the plan seeks to build on the success of Co-op City in the Bronx, the sprawling 15,000-unit-Mitchell-Lama development, while avoiding the mistakes. The plan is available at <https://bit.ly/3gCuhRd>

A virtual mini-city

If it ever comes to fruition, the proposal, which had been in the planning stage for two years, would create a virtual mini-city atop the massive train yards owned by Amtrak.

Four years before the actual planning began, the railroad company had approached the city to suggest they cooperate on some type of long-range planning for the area.

According to EDC, the plan released in March "was shaped by over 100 public interviews, four community workshops, three large public meetings, a digital town hall, walking tours, and group discussions with over 145 organizations to understand the pressing needs of the communities surrounding the Yard."

No market-rate housing

As currently envisioned, all the housing will be considered affordable, that is, nothing will be market rate. Three thousands units will be reserved for families earning below 30 percent of the area median income, or roughly \$29,000 per year for a family of three; another three thousand will be set for the same size households earning less than 50 percent of AMI, or about \$48,000; and the remaining six thousand units will be available at rents modeled after Mitchell-Lama housing, that is, for households earning 100 percent of AMI.

The scale of the housing is envisioned as being in sync with the surrounding Queens communities, including high-rise structures closer to Long Island City and mid-rise structures nearer to Sunnyside.

In releasing the plan, EDC noted that the selection process of choosing developers will emphasize "prioritizing minority- and women-owned firms," and will embrace community land trusts and "green building technologies like mass timber, passive and highly efficient buildings, and rainwater capture."

Residents near Gowanus Canal demand NYCHA fix before rezoning

The city should pay more attention to dealing with the myriad problems of the neighborhood's NYCHA complex before they move ahead to approve zoning changes to the area surrounding the Gowanus Canal, according to residents of Brooklyn's Gowanus neighborhood (which abuts several other communities).

The residents, along with environmentalists and local officials, met in February, just prior to the onset of the Covid-19 shutdown.

The meeting was one of several community confabs held to discuss a proposal released in January 2019 by the Department of City Planning.

The proposal, according to the DCP, "lays the foundation for how the Gowanus neighborhood can grow and change and become a thriving, inclusive, and more resilient Gowanus." It attempts to "support mixed-use growth with affordable housing, [develop] areas to maintain and grow Gowanus' commercial and industrial businesses, and [offer] special tools to activate ground floors and create new public spaces."

But the creation of "new" spaces was not as essential as fixing the problems in *existing* spaces, residents maintained.

Among the demands expressed at the meeting were up-front funding of the public housing development, and eliminating the sewage entering the canal. They also wanted the creation of an environmental special district.

Fixing NYCHA's problems, including mold, lead, inoperative elevators, leaky pipes and lack of heat in the winter, were front and center. "Fix our homes before you rezone!" was a chant by the members of the Gowanus Neighborhood Coalition for Justice and the Families United for Racial and Economic Equality.

Regarding sewage repair, rainstorms often flood the sewers, thereby overwhelming waste treatment plants. This results in raw sewage entering the city's waterways. The city needs to develop and share a plan to deal with this problem, the environmentalists insisted.

Responding to the complaints, Jane Meyer, a City Hall spokeswoman, said that "This administration is committed to reversing decades of disinvestment in NYCHA that affects the residents that call it home," Meyer said. "The city is exploring all ideas to address significant concerns related to NYCHA to ensure funding for necessary repairs."

Kips Bay NYCHA tenants worry as privatized management proceeds

Public housing tenants in one of Manhattan's neighborhoods are alleging that they are kept in the dark concerning their future, as NYCHA begins its process of transforming the development to private management.

The development is located in the borough's Kips Bay neighborhood, which extends roughly from East 23rd to East 34th Streets, from the East River to around Third Avenue.

Because of a lack of information from management as renovation proceeds, many tenants are living in "total abject fear," according to Melanie Aucello, president of the tenant association, who was quoted in *The City*, an online news source.

Among the tenants' concerns are what will happen to them as renovation proceeds during the Covid-19 pandemic, and whether they will have to move. Some tenants may have to temporarily relocate until renovations are completed.

NYCHA's management, however, claimed that it has set up meetings to "let

all residents know the status of the project and answer resident questions." Further, although some residents may have to move temporarily, hospitality suites will be made available to those wishing to leave during renovation.

Depending on what happens during the pandemic, roughly 62,000 units are scheduled to be converted over the coming years under two programs, RAD (Rental Assistance Demonstration) and PACT (Permanent Affordable Commitment Together). Under RAD, units will be converted to Section 8 contracts; under PACT, NYCHA engages in public-private partnerships to renovate and manage. Accord to the Authority, "The federal RAD program ensures permanent affordability, while New York City's PACT ensures some of the strongest resident protections in the country."

Still, in addition to individual complaints, many tenants fear the conversions to private management will spark an increase in gentrification, leading to subsequent pressures to vacate.

Son of former M-L official buys semi-stabilized J. Adams in Forest Hills

Nelson Management Group, whose principal owner is the son of a former city commissioner of Mitchell-Lama housing who eventually became one of the largest owners of M-L developments in New York, has purchased the John Adams, a partially rent-stabilized 115-unit development in Forest Hills.

At a cost of \$26.5 million, the purchase adds to Nelson's holdings of some 3,500 apartments in twenty buildings. Among his properties are Hillside Homes, Winthrop Gardens, and Leland House.

After leaving municipal service, Daniel Nelson, the father, was the "first owner in NYC to buy-out of the Mitchell-Lama program and eventually brought all of his properties out of the program," said Katy Bordonaro, MLRC's Corresponding Secretary.

"Because they were constructed before 1974, they all became rent stabilized apartments. Subsequently, some became co-operatives."

Robert Nelson's current purchase, the John Adams, is a 112,596-square-foot property that contains 54 free-market, 57 rent-stabilized, and two rent-controlled units. The mixed-use building also features two ground-floor office spaces, along with numerous amenities, according to the Nelson website.

So far as landlords go, Nelson "is viewed in a fairly decent light," Bordonaro said. "He has made a few missteps--as with facial recognition, but has then sent out the letter regarding applying for COVID rent relief to his tenants."

NYC Voucher terminations halted until further notice

In a public message to the city's tenants and "community partners," the Department of Social Services announced that "While the HPD Section 8 Customer Service Office is closed to the public, the HPD Section 8 team is still available to the public. Voucher holders facing rent hardships due to drops in income should email DTRAI@hpd.nyc.gov or fax at 212-863-5299.

"During this time, any HPD Section 8 voucher set to expire will be automatically renewed. Clients do not need to reach out to HPD for an extension.

"All subsidy terminations in process are suspended until further notice. All tenant conferences & briefings are postponed & will be rescheduled. All hearings for appeal are cancelled until further notice. HPD will continue to pay the subsidy until final determinations are made."

Affordable housing news from around the nation

National: End of eviction moratorium will most harm people of color

The end of the temporary eviction moratorium in housing benefiting from federally backed mortgages — covering about twelve million apartments — is likely to impact most heavily on communities of color, largely because Black and Latinx tenants pay a higher share of their income on rent than White tenants. The moratorium, set because of the Covid-19 virus, will end towards the end of July. According to the US Census Household Plus survey, forty-four percent of Black tenants have little or no confidence that they will be able to afford their next rent payment. (Several states have their own eviction bans, such as New Jersey, which covers some tenants in hotels, and San Francisco, which bars Covid-19-related evictions permanently.)

Chicago: One-time rent grant program overwhelmed by applications

To address the difficulty of paying rent during the Covid-19 economic shutdown, Chicago's housing department offered one-time grants of \$1,000 each, enough for two thousand of the city's tenants. During the first few days of the program, eighty-three thousand people applied. Also, for landlords of affordable housing, the city offered a new grant program to compensate for shortfalls in rent.

Missoula, Mont: Motel will shelter Covid-19 homeless

The City Council approved the purchase in April of a small motel in the downtown area that had been fully functioning since the 1940s, for use as a short term housing fix for homeless people who test positive for Covid-19, and would therefore need to isolate or self-quarantine themselves. If and when the pandemic ends, the hotel, The Sleepy Inn, may be used for permanent low-cost housing.

Washington, D.C. Owners must offer rent payment plans

Many tenants in the nation's capital who are having difficulty paying rent because of Covid-19 now have the right to negotiate a rent payment plan with their landlords, thanks to a new rule passed by the D.C. Council. The rule applies to landlords who have at least five residential tenants, as well as

to commercial landlords. A previous rule had temporarily banned evictions, held up rent increases, and prohibited late fees.

Also in D.C., Black Homes Matter, which models its name after the organization that sparked the largest anti-racism movement since the civil rights/black power era, is calling for the city council's fiscal 2021 budget to include investments in public housing repairs, emergency rental assistance, and other needs that disproportionately affect Black DC residents, especially now since Black and Brown communities are at greater risk of Covid-19 exposure than white residents.

Seattle: Amazon to build homeless shelter on campus

Amazon has partnered with a local homeless shelter to construct a new shelter on the state's college campus. The effort is widely presumed to be the corporate behemoth's response to criticism that its presence and expansion has skyrocketed the city's rents, thereby contributing to an upsurge in homelessness.

Minneapolis: Low-income tenants co-op buildings of former slumlord

After winning a landmark \$18.5 million lawsuit for thousands of their landlord's former tenants, Latinx families in five Minneapolis buildings suffering from years of neglect celebrated in July not only a legal victory but their success in buying and transforming the buildings into a tenant-run cooperative. After the city revoked the slumlord's real estate license, in 2017, the owner agreed to sell off his sprawling slum empire. (He was further barred from owning rental properties in the city for five years.) Tenants secured funding for the purchase from the nonprofit Land Bank Twin Cities, which in turn received grants from the Local Initiatives Support Corp. and a zero-interest loan from a city program.

Oakland: New anti-harrasment rules protect tenants

New amendments to the city's law will limit rent increases in one year (to the consumer price index plus 5%) and late fees (to 3% of rent); and will prohibit eviction for new roommates, if the landlord unreasonably refuses to allow them. Harassment includes lockouts, utility shutoffs, removing tenants' belongings and ousting tenants from their homes, all of which have been exacerbated during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Local Housing Briefs

One in 100 NYC newborns go directly to a homeless shelter

One out of every one hundred babies born in New York City during 2019 went directly from the hospital to a shelter for the homeless, according to a new [report](#) from the Coalition for the Homeless. Noting that in December 2019, nearly fifteen thousand families slept in shelters, a soaring 46 percent increase over the past ten years, the group criticizes Mayor de Blasio's housing plan for "creating a glut of high-rent units instead of investing in the production of desperately needed extremely low-rent apartments." But it also notes that "This imbalance will finally begin to shift with the enactment of Local Law 19 of 2020, which will require the City to allocate a minimum of 15 percent of apartments to homeless New Yorkers in new City-subsidized buildings over 40 units."

HPD notes slumlords face \$400,000 in fines

The city's department of Housing Preservation and Development said in March that slumlords in Manhattan and the Bronx are facing almost \$400,000 in penalties for some six hundred fifty violations in six buildings. Among buildings whose owners face fines is 31 Mt. Hope Place in the Bronx, where its owners racked up 179 violations and more than 75 falsified repairs.

Evictions in city down notably last year

Evictions in the city have declined fifteen percent in 2019, largely a result of two laws: one that mandates a right to counsel for low-income tenants facing housing court issues; and the other the ground-breaking tenant protection act passed by NY State in June 2019, which sought, among other things, to prevent evictions through huge rent increases for stabilized tenants. (These laws, however, were passed before the Covid-19 outbreak, which has resulted in massive job losses, threatening the ability to pay rent.)

Hotels for permanent homeless housing?

Housing officials are exploring whether to convert some of the city's ailing hotels, which have been reeling under the decline in tourism during the Covid-19 crisis, as permanent Single Room Only (SRO) housing for the city's homeless population. Construction of SROs ended in the 1970s.

Stuy-town, Cooper Village tenants sue owners over deregulation plan

Tenants in Stuyvesant Town and Peter Cooper Village filed suit in March against their landlords, alleging that the owners' plan to deregulate certain apartments would violate a new state law, the Housing and Stability Tenant Protection Act, passed last June.

When the owners, subsidiaries of the private equity firms Blackstone and Ivanhoe Cambridge, purchased the two east side complexes in 2015, at a cost of \$5.23 billion, they assured tenants that 45 percent of the apartments, or around five thousand units, would remain affordable. But they argue today that a settlement reached in 2012 guarantees that six thousand units would revert to deregulated status once they were removed from New York State's J-51 tax exemption, a program intended to stimulate property renovation and improvement.

A spokesperson for the owners

said that "We are confident that the court will reaffirm the 2012 Roberts settlement, which explicitly stated that these J-51 units should no longer be subject to rent regulation as of June 2020."

Tenants, however, argue that the new state law, passed in 2019, bars deregulation even after J-51 ends. According to State Senator Brad Hoylman, the tenants are right. "We stated in the law that there is no expiration date on rent-stabilized housing," he said.

Although the city and the state are both included in the lawsuit, the de Blasio administration appears to be siding with the tenants. An administration spokesperson said that the "terms of the earlier litigation make clear that these homes are subject to the stricter rent laws and tenant protections and they must remain under those protections."

ANHD calls for aid beyond rent and eviction freezes

Among the first in the nation to call for moratoria on rents and evictions during the Covid-19 pandemic, the Association for Neighborhoods and Housing Development, a leading community advocate, has now issued several additional demands, such as utility fee decreases and nonprofit assistance.

Arguing that "Historically marginalized neighborhoods and communities will be most acutely impacted and left particularly vulnerable," the group noted early on that in "New York, low-income communities of color and immigrant communities will face the brunt not only of the medical crisis that is upon us, but also the growing economic crisis in the form of evictions, mounting debt, job loss, and community disinvestment."

Following is a summary of ANHD's requests:

- ¶ Issue a moratorium on evictions and pass Good Cause eviction regulations
- ¶ Freeze commercial and residential rents
- ¶ Extend residential rent-regulated leases

- ¶ Temporarily suspend mortgages and issue a moratorium on mortgage actions

- ¶ Provide emergency support for affordable housing developers

- ¶ Rehouse those overcrowding in impacted residences

- ¶ Reduce utility payments

- ¶ Implement financial protections for small businesses

- ¶ Issue a moratorium on ULURP processes [ULURP stands for urban land use review procedure]

- ¶ Provide emergency fiscal support for nonprofits

- ¶ Fund universal paid sick leave, childcare, and unemployment insurance

- ¶ Suspend all debt — including student loans, credit card, and medical debt

- ¶ Issue a moratorium on ICE

- ¶ Ensure immigrants can safely access healthcare and services

- ¶ Issue a moratorium on low-level arrests and other criminal proceedings

- ¶ End Medicaid cuts and provide free COVID-19 testing and care

New landlord-tenant mediation program to debut in the city

An effort to facilitate landlord-tenant disputes through mediation rather than through housing court was announced by the de Blasio administration in July. The aim of the program is to help lower income tenants, or any tenant in a vulnerable situation, avoid eviction.

The Landlord-Tenant Mediation Project, to be administered by HPD, will accept tenants who are referred by Community Dispute Resolution Centers, which will be located in all boroughs. The centers will focus on tenants who have no access to lawyers.

The aim of the program is to persuade landlords to avoid lengthy eviction proceedings, especially in the current Covid-19 situation which has forced many tenants out of their jobs, thereby exacerbating the difficulty of paying rent.

LHC: Affordability 'out of reach' for many

New York State residents must earn at least \$32.50 an hour in order to afford a two-bedroom apartment. But the official minimum wage here is \$14.50 an hour, or less than half of what is needed.

Further, workers here who earn the minimum wage will need to clock in one hundred and ten hours per week to meet the average "fair market" rent without spending more than 30 percent of their incomes. People spending more than that percentage are said to be rent-burdened, or, if severe enough, rent-poor.

Data on the relationship between earnings and housing affordability in every state appear in a new report, "Out of Reach," by the National Low Income Housing Coalition. Although the data are statewide, they often understate the situation for renters in various cities, like New York. (In the city and surrounding areas, the required wage is fifteen dollars.)

On the national level, the report notes the "Twelve of the 20 largest occupations in the United States pay a median hourly wage that is less than what a full-time worker needs to earn to afford a modest apartment at the national average fair market rent. The workers in these occupations account for more than 38% of the total U.S. workforce, excluding farmworkers."

In no governmental jurisdiction of the US can a worker "earning the federal or prevailing local minimum wage afford a modest two-bedroom rental home at fair market rent by working a standard 40-hour work week."