MITCHELL-LAMA RESIDENTS COALITION

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WEBSITE: www.mitchell-lama.org

Queens stadium plan to include largest housing development since M-L

The largest affordable housing project since the start of the Mitchell-Lama program almost a half-century ago will come to Queens under an agreement reached by the City and the New York Football Club in November.

The $2 billion agreement calls for developing a huge soccer or football stadium in a five-block area known as **Willets Point**, an industrial area in the Astoria section of the borough, along with a hotel, museum and retail stores. The land is currently owned by the city.

As part of the deal, the Club will build around 3000 apartments, of which 1400 will be designated as affordable. (In an earlier release, the Mayor's office had promised 2500 affordable units.)

Those 1400 units will be allocated to residents of various income levels, including the very low-income. Some units will be designated as supportive housing.

It was the increase in the number of affordable apartments—the initial offer was for 700 units—that finally won the approval of Council Member Julie Won, who, with other progressive legislators, was originally against the plan.

Also, as noted by The Gothamist, the plan includes a set-aside of $2 million "for free legal services to protect neighboring tenants from displacement, discrimination and harassment."

From amusement park to 'utopia': the real story of Co-op City & its residents

Review by Nathan Weber

If there is one thing many urban planners and academics are convinced about Co-op City, the country's largest housing development ever, and New York State's largest Mitchell-Lama undertaking, it is that the 35 towers and seven town house clusters amount to a monstrosity, a racially-charged manifestation of urban alienation that depleted other neighborhoods of their vitality and diversity and that should never have been constructed.

> Samartino, Annamarie, *Freedomland: Co-op City and the story of New York*, Cornell Univ. Press, 2022

To be honest, I sorta thought that myself.

But to Annemarie H. Sammartino,

(Continued on page 8)

New voucher reforms aim to help city's homeless avoid refuge in shelters

A series of fundamental reforms in the City's voucher program, long sought by advocates for the homeless, was announced in November by Mayor Eric Adams.

The reforms, such as lowering the amount of money homeless families have to give to enter the program, allowing single men to enter, and enabling those who earn slightly above the former minimum amount to participate, are designed to help low-income families and individuals, including the homeless, stay out of the shelter system.

Among other things, the reforms to program, known as CityPHEPS (Family Homelessness & Eviction Prevention Supplement), include the following:

¶ Opens the program to "include single adults working full-time on minimum wage, even if their income is slightly higher than 200 percent of the federal poverty level;"

¶ Reduces the amount of time families have to work to become eligible for CityFHEPS from 30 to 14 hours per week;

¶ Lowers the monthly contribution by CityFHEPS tenants who move into single-room occupancy apartments "from 30 percent of their income to a maximum of $50 per month."

The full list of reforms, as presented by the Mayor's office, can be found on page 8.

(Continued on page 8)

Strengthen MLRC
Join today (use form on page 2)

MLRC
General Membership Meeting
Saturday, January 21, 2023 at 10 a.m.

Note: During the Covid-19 pandemic, the 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

Manhattan DA creates new office to prosecute harassment and fraud

Tenants and small homeowners who are being harassed or defrauded now have an ally in Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg's office: a newly established, five-member team to investigate and criminally prosecute abusive landlords, developers who con the government by cheating on subsidy programs, and housing speculators engaged in "deed theft"—a process whereby a speculator forges a small owner's signature or otherwise fools her or him into signing over a deed.

The new office will cooperate with tenant protection units in other municipal and nonprofit agencies, but most of the cases brought by those groups tend to be processed through civil rather than criminal trials, since most housing abuses do not rise to the level of official criminality.

Evictions & deed theft

So where circumstances warrant, the new DA office will "Prioritize criminal enforcement for large landlords and corporate landlords." Still, it will emphasize financial restitution over prison terms.

The new team will deal with abuses under the "rent stabilization law; laws governing the habitability of homes, especially in NYCHA housing, as well as tenant harassment; fraud in the financing of multifamily rental housing; and deed fraud." The comments were made in Bragg's presentation while he was campaigning for the DA office.

In terms of fraud against the government, Bragg specifically mentioned the tax incentive programs known as 421-a and J-51, both of which offer tax benefits to owners in exchange for affordable rents. Both, he said, are "rife with abuse."

In addition, the new office will "Build relationships with tenants' associations, direct services providers, and legal services organizations."

Bragg discussed the new office on a WBAI radio program in October, "City Watch," hosted by *City Limits* deputy editor David Brand, who also prepared an online report on the new office.

On his official website, Bragg said "Tips and complaints can be submitted to the Unit's hotline at 212-335-8900." Or tips can be emailed to Danyhousing@dany.nyc.gov."

He added that his office is "a safe place to report crime regardless of your immigration status."

The first case brought by the new unit applies to six Brooklyn developers. See story on page 5.

Urban Land Institute gives excellence award to WHEDco

The Urban Land Institute, which establishes national standards in buildings and land use, has given the Women's Housing and Development Corp. (WHEDco) its 2022 Award for Excellence. The group's **Bronx Commons**, opened in 2020, contains "305 LEED-certified affordable apartments for families; the Bronx Music Hall (permanent home of the Bronx Music Heritage Center), a performance venue and archive space; a green roof; ground-level retail space, and public green space."

JOIN THE MITCHELL-LAMA RESIDENTS COALITION 2023

INDIVIDUAL: $15 per year; DEVELOPMENT: 25 cents per apt
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UPCOMING EVENTS

MLRC General Membership Meeting

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

Saturday, January 21, 2023
10:00 a.m. - noon

Members will be notified regular mail

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

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Plan for Manhattan's Mid-westside covers over 14,600 affordable units

A plan covering a total of 14,692 affordable housing units, including those already completed and those under construction, was released in October by Manhattan's Community Planning Board #4, which spans the areas of Chelsea, Clinton, and Hudson Yards, all on the west side.

Portion of Mid-westside

The plan is not a completely new undertaking; rather, it builds on a document first issued in 2015 and periodically reviewed by the full Board, lastly in 2019. As its authors note, the plan is intended to act "as a living document," adjusting its recommendations to account for changes in social, economic and legal developments affecting the broad community.

Key recommendations of the plan include:

• **Transfer projects from other city agencies to HPD**, which is necessary to bring all sites to "construction readiness." For sites already under HPD management, the plan recommends working with tenants, nonprofit developers and other stakeholders to identify sources of financing.

• **Work with the Mayor's office and HPD** to meet the previously agreed upon affordable housing rezoning commitments on sites "unable to move forward for various reasons."

• **Identify other publicly owned sites**—such as those under state and federal agencies—for additional affordable housing.

• **Assure affordability for a variety of income levels**, including moderate- and middle-income, as well as low-income.

• **Preserve current affordable housing through severe penalties for illegal demolition**, to be accomplished through a new unit in the Department of Buildings to prioritize enforcement; a new "penalty structure" in the city Administrative Code (the compilation of NYC's laws); and "a zoning text amendment to disincentivize and sufficiently deter, and when needed, cure illegal demolition." The amendment would be similar to the Clinton District Cure for Harassment.

• **Develop rezoning and new zoning amendments**, which would entail "more density to ensure the development of affordable housing, particularly if the development contains 100% permanently affordable housing."

• **Make inclusionary housing mandatory**, and require at least thirty percent of all new housing to be affordable.

• **Require all apartment finishes to be the same throughout a building** with onsite Inclusionary Housing Units for tenants of all income levels. Further, all building amenities should be equally available to all residents regardless of income. And low-income tenants should be given a discount for gym facilities.

• **Ensure the provision of family-size apartments**, and provide housing for a growing senior population. Update standards for such needs as independent living, assisted living, and skilled nursing care, all within the same building.

New Treasury rule enables more to apply for affordable units

A new federal rule regarding the Low Income Housing Tax Credit should serve to increase the number of people who qualify for affordable homes.

In October, the U.S. Treasury Dept. ruled that at least forty percent of the apartments be made available in buildings using the credit (which can offset more than two-thirds of the construction cost), compared with the former rule mandating only twenty percent.

Further, the former rule applied primarily to residents earning only 50 percent of the area's median income. Now residents earning up to 60 percent can be accepted.

Finally, applicants can average their income over several years, rather than using only their latest year's income, which should further increase their qualifications.

As housing needs soar, thousands of affordable units kept off the market

In a city where the likelihood of renting an apartment without going bankrupt is rapidly becoming a pipe dream, close to 90,000 rent-stabilized apartments remained vacant last year.

In a city where the need for supportive housing for people with a variety of physical and emotional special needs is pervasive, close to 2,600 such units are vacant.

In a city where some 3,400 people live on the streets or in the subway system day after day—a figure advocates say is underestimated—the government has filled only around two hundred of the 2,500 units for homeless it has available.

As advocates for tenant rights, special needs and the homeless demonstrate their angry frustration at this unprecedented situation, at least three legislative proposals have emerged in response:

¶ Intro 195, a City Council bill submitted by Councilwoman Carlina Rivera would require annual registration of all vacant apartments, including those that are rent-stabilized. The bill also calls for the city to inspect at least fifteen percent of them for potential law violations;

¶ NY Assembly bill A5988, introduced by Assemblywoman Linda Rosenthal, which would remove tax benefits from landlords who hold apartments vacant;

¶ State Senator Zellnor Myrie's Tenant Opportunity Purchase Act, which provides low-income tenants first choice in buying their buildings if the landlord puts them up for sale. Such buildings, when so purchased, would remain permanently affordable as limited-equity cooperatives.

Former deputy mayor creates new affordable housing fund

Alicia Glen, the founder of MSquared, a women-owned real estate firm, and both a former NYC deputy mayor of housing and economic development and a former exective at Goldman Sachs, has set up a new fund offering incentives to developers of affordable housing. It will begin operations with twenty million dollars in seed capital, provided by Trinity Church Wall Street.

Called Affordable NYC Fund, it will offer both non-profit and for-profit developers "flexible" and "cost-effective" financing in an effort to generate more affordable housing in the city. It will also emphasize funding to minority- and women-owned developers.

Throggs Neck rezoning plan revived; 348 units, about half affordable

A dozen vacant lots and an empty batting cage in the Throggs Neck area of The Bronx will likely be replaced by four eight-story buildings containing 348 rental apartments, around half of which will be considered affordable for low- to middle-income tenants and seniors.

Housing in the area, which abuts the Hudson River, currently consists largely of one- and two-family homes, usually with a parking space.

Councilwoman's reversal

The long-running battle to upzone the area to allow for buildings of larger density came to a virtual close in late October, as Marjorie Velázquez, the Councilwoman who represents the area, and the NYC District Council of Carpenters reversed their opposition, thereby paving the way for the full Council to vote on the issue, which is largely expected to pass.

Velázquez's opposition had been based largely on the plan's earlier neglect to give local residents priority in hiring.

In explaining her decision to reverse her opposition, Velázquez said the upzoning "provides tangible benefits for the people of our community and transforms the unfortunate reality that this office before me had been unable to provide affordable housing for our residents, with less than sixty units produced in the last eight years. We have far surpassed that in less than a year."

Opponents' views

Community opposition to the upzoning plan, however, remains forceful, as long-time residents complain that the area's suburban-type environment will be permanently destroyed.

Janine Franciosa, a 40-year-old lifetime resident, was quoted in media reports as saying that the neighborhood is "mostly a working-class, middle-class community that appreciates urban living but not congested urban living."

Residents also claim that they were never fully involved in the planning.

Fear of change?

Fear of population change, however, may also be a key factor motivating the opposition.

In the summer of 2021, one long-time 78-year-old resident who signed an anti-rezoning petition was quoted in *New York's Curbed* website as saying that "The area's still good; no violence, nobody gets in trouble. And I would think it'd be a shame to put up one of these big buildings and you don't know what kind of people they're going to put in there."

Neighborhood makeup

Roughly half the neighborhood's residents are tenants, and many are considered by the US Census Bureau to be rent-burdened, that is, not earning enough to pay going rates.

Developers for the plan include owners of a local supermarket. During the controversy, they complained that they were castigated as mega-developer interlopers. Peter Bivona, one of the owners of Super Foodtown, argued that "We're not your Tishman, not your L&L. We're a part of the fabric of our community, and the community is turning against us. That's where our feelings got hurt."

During the summer, when the battle was at a high intensity, Bivona was quoted in *The City* as saying "How would you want to be treated if you needed a place to live that you could afford, and this neighborhood wasn't able to . . .348 units is nothing. It's really nothing."

NYCHA: drop in rental income imperils court schedule of repairs

A steep drop in rental income, resulting largely from the spread of Covid, has threatened to prevent NYCHA from meeting a court-appointed deadline of repairing aging boilers, non-functioning elevators, mold, and other problems.

The amount of arrears reached $443 million, four times the figure at the start of the pandemic in March 2020. During the same period, operating costs have increased considerably, according to a report in *The City*.

Letters

HDFC Co-ops: hurting those on waiting lists

To the Editor:

The people in central Harlem who, after 19 years of waiting, are being cut out of affordable housing ownership by the NYC Department of Housing Preservation and Development, have the sympathy of all real New Yorkers.

HPD's cold-hearted attitude is also seen in its current plan to turn all Mitchell-Lama co-ops into more expensive HDFC co-ops, cutting out all the people who have been on waiting lists for decades. The only reason for HPD's plan? To give a windfall profit to the people presently living in Mitchell-Lamas. Sounds like the same plan that is cutting working people out of their dreams at 206 West 120th Street. --Mary Foutz

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

'Frankenstein' makes an appearance at a state hearing on landlord tactics

When New York state passed the historic Housing Stability and Tenant Protection Act of 2019—which, among other things, ended the policy of vacancy decontrol—tenants and supporters of affordable housing cheered. From now on, they assumed, regulation, and therefore affordability in the midst of an epidemic of sky-high rents, would be permanent.

Enter Dr. Frankenstein.

Landlords, who had vigorously opposed the 2019 Act, had discovered a loophole: create a "monster," or totally new apartment, either by combining two or more vacant rent-regulated units into one new unit, or by dividing a single unit into two separate apartments, which could then be rented at New York City's astronomically high market rates.

And if landlords want more than a mere two additional unregulated units, they can "substantially rehabilitate" an entire building, by replacing three-quarters of the internal systems like plumbing or heating. All they need do is "prove" that the building had been in the throes of deterioration, by pointing to a legally-required vacancy rate of 80 percent.

This policy of "Frankensteining" is second cousin to the traditional practice of warehousing, the holding of vacant apartments off the market in the expectation of future vacancies that can then be combined to form unregulated units. Also, the more vacant apartments in a building, the closer the building will be to meeting the 80 percent vacancy requirement for "substantial rehabilitation."

Tenants have long charged that owners often use pressure tactics to vacate units. Such measures include offering only short-term leases, pressuring them to switch apartments, and the traditional harassment techniques employed through disruptive construction work.

Loopholes in the state's tenant protection act

At a November hearing before the state's Division of Housing and Community Renewal, which heard from both tenants and owners, landlord representatives argued that Frankensteining and warehousing were the only alternatives left to owners to recoup their expenses in the face of stringent rent regulations, according to a report in *The City*.

They also argued that any changes in the law, as proposed by HCR, amount to "throwing hurdles in the way of owners who wish to bring their buildings into the 21st century."

Housing group says HUD's income standard for the New York area will exclude poorest

A national advocacy group for affordable housing condemned the federal government's new New York Metro income standard for eligibility to federally-supported residential buildings, arguing that the higher standard will exclude renters at the lower income levels.

The New York Housing Conference said in November that the new Median Area Incomes (AMI) figure released by the department of Housing and Urban Development "is wildly out of sync with the modest income increases experienced by renters."

The group added that the increased AMIs "threaten to make subsidized affordable housing out of reach to the lowest-income New Yorkers at a time of great crisis."

The AMI figure is the federal standard by which city and state housing agencies set affordability in local programs. Under the new standard, which increased by 16 percent over last year and by 34 percent over the past four years, very low-income residents will be excluded.

"For example," the group said, "a three-person family with one adult working full-time making minimum wage ($15 per hour), with an annual income of $31,200, earns $403 less each month than HUD's extremely low-income standard."

Given these financial realities, the city's HPD programs "would not cover anyone earning minimum wage and working 40 hours per week."

The group added that the median income in the city is around $60,500, and for city renters it's only around $50,000.

But HUD's new AMI defines low-income limits for a family of three at $96,080, and for very low-income, the limit is $60,050.

Six indicted for violation of tax abatement program

Six developers of Brooklyn buildings who utilized the 421a tax abatement program were indicted in November for fraudulently charging exorbitant rents rather than the required affordable rents.

The indictments were obtained by Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg and Commissioner of Investigation Jocelyn E. Strauber.

"These developers allegedly abused a government program meant to provide New Yorkers access to desperately needed affordable housing," Bragg said in a release. "Not only did they illegally charge substantially higher market rents for years, but they did so while personally reaping the benefits of generous property tax abatements."

Charges include grand larceny in the second degree, city criminal tax fraud and filing false instruments with the government.

The developers are Joel Kohn, Michael Ambrosino, Alen Paknoush, Mendel Gold, Ioan Sita and Gheorghe Sita.

Manhattanville Houses to get new luxury neighbor

Manhattanville Houses, a NYCHA development of six buildings housing three thousand tenants, will soon have a new neighbor: a 26-story mostly-luxury apartment building on an empty lot next door, at 1440 Amsterdam Avenue.

Among the 393 new units, 120 will be set aside for "income-restricted" earners who will be eligible for below-market rate rents.

Eligibility for these apartments will include people earning no more than 130 percent of the area median income, which means that individuals earning up to $120,000 annually will be accepted. However, NYCHA tenants will be given preference for a quarter of those units.

The developer, GRID Group, purchased the land and air rights from NYCHA for $28 million, money that the authority says will be used to fund building repairs and upgrades. Some reports, however, indicate that NYCHA needs far more to make sufficient repairs: $223 million for new kitchens, bathrooms, windows, roofs, etc.

Renovations are slated to begin in 2024; the new building is expected to open in 2026.

In addition to the apartments, the tower will house a new supermarket and smaller retail stores.

Residents have formed a committee to review potential partners and plans.

Growth of corporate landlords threatens affordable home ownership

While landlords traditionally complain that their expenses take an enormous toll on their income, they are under no obligation to actually prove it, since privately held companies are not required to release their financial records.

But this is not the case with publicly traded landlords—corporate building owners whose stocks are traded on markets like NYSE or NASDAQ. Although these "public landlords" are not well known to the general public, they include such firms as Redfin, Zillow, Apartment Income REIT, Essex Property Trust, AIR, etc.

No complaints were heard from these owners this year, perhaps because their books are legally open to review.

Double-digit profit

And what did such reviews indicate? According to a major real estate reporting service, "Seven of the nation's top publicly traded landlords reported year-over-year profit gains in the double digits in the third quarter, showing that both their business models and corporate ledgers have been insulated from the worst effects of the current financing environment."

And it's not just the top seven. The service went on to note that "Nearly all public landlords have seen revenues grow much faster than operating expenses over the past 12 months."

Low corporate debt, low concern about inflation

Even corporate debt, which can be a drain on income, was shrugged off; most if not all of these mega owners "have low levels of corporate debt and years to go before the bulk of their debt matures, a result of having taken advantage of low interest rates to refinance in the preceding few years."

While tenants and some small owners of one or a few buildings have legitimate complaints about inflation, not so these landlords. "And all [corporate owners] have experienced the benefits of housing inflation, or *arguably contributed to it*, by raising rents faster than their costs are rising." Emphasis added.

So far, most buildings purchased by giant corporations tend to be single-family homes, which results in pricing out first time would-be homeowners.

This is the case in such cities as Newark, N.J., where Mayor Ras Baraka, who has been trying to increase the options for home ownership among the largely Black population, recently announced various initiatives to combat the process.

During the past three years, in fact, nearly half of Newark's residential property was sold to corporate buyers, "a model designed to enrich investors through returns from rent collection, and a nationwide trend that can displace residents and impede home ownership," according to a study by Rutgers University.

Nor is Newark the only area experiencing the process. Throughout Massachusetts last year, as a local radio station noted, "business entities purchased nearly 6,600 single-family homes across the state, more than 9 percent of all single-family homes sold. That's nearly double the rate of such purchases a decade ago."

Nationwide issue

As noted by the Rutgers study, the process, which contributes heavily to the escalation of home prices, is nationwide. "The rapid rise in the price of housing has also coincided with large-scale investors entering the market at seemingly unprecedented levels. Over the course of 2021, major investors purchased about one in seven single-family homes across major U.S. metropolitan areas. . . . The year marked investors' most [activity] in almost two decades."

At some point, perhaps, the ever-escalating prices of homes, spurred by corporate acquisition, may dampen demand, and therefore start to take a toll on the corporations' profit, which in turn may, eventually, cause a downward pressure on home prices.

But in the forseeable future, the so-called American dream of owning an affordable home is being rapidly underminded.

NYCHA tenants to vote on newly formed Preservation Trust

Residents of the city's Public Housing Authority developments will vote in 2023 on whether their particular complex should participate in NYCHA's newly formed Preservation Trust—an entity legally entitled to borrow money on its own, rather than, as at present, having to depend on government funding.

At the beginning of 2022, NYCHA received just under $4.2 billion from all sources, including rent. Federal and city funds accounted for almost $3.8 billion of that amount, or almost 92 percent.

The voting procedure will offer tenants four options:

- To join the Trust;
- To switch funding to a Section 8 system (which provides individual residents with subsidies);
- To engage in a PACT relationship, which entials selling NYCHA land to private developers who would then make repairs in NYCHA buildings;
- To remain under the traditional Section 9 funding, under which governments simply give NYCHA operating and capital funds.

Supporters of the Trust argue that it will free NYCHA from having to wait upon outside and perhaps volatile political decisions to fund or not fund.

Opponents counter that the Trust will incur a debt that may well be overwhelming, and will eventually "prioritize creditors and debt-service over residents and community needs, open the possibility for future foreclosure, and ultimately dismantle" traditional funding, with no viable alternative, according to a *City Limits* report.

Another concern of opponents is that only ten percent of the households in any specific development, rather than a majority, will need to participate in the vote for it to be binding.

The Mitchell Lama Residents Coalition

wishes all our members, tenant and co-operator activists, public officials and all who support affordable housing

A very happy and healthy new year

Affordable housing news from around the nation

National: Drop in veteran homelessness highest in five years

Homelessness among veterans declined eleven percent since early 2020, the largest drop in more than five years, according to HUD, which made the announcement in a release citing cooperation with the Department of Veteran Affairs and the US Interagency Council on Homelessness.

Kingston, NY: Temporary halt to historic 15% rent rollback

One week after the upstate city's rent guidelines board passed the first rent rollback in history, an Ulster County Supreme Court temporarily blocked the order.

Early in November, the board passed a 15 percent reduction for tenants in around 1,200 apartments with leases ending next September 30. The decision also allowed tenants to challenge their initial rents over the past three years, if they suspected any violation of fair market rules. As of this writing, landlord groups have temporarily won on their agenda to stymie the rollback.

Tucson, Ariz.: Council bans source of income discrimination

Tenants who receive government vouchers or other assistance can no longer be legally prevented from obtaining an apartment, thanks to a new measure that bans source of income discrimination. The law adds the measure to its established anti-discrimination list, which includes race, religion, gender, and sexual orientation.

An owner group, the Arizona Multihousing Association, opposed the measure, instead urging the government to offer "financial incentives for landlords for damage waivers and insurance," as reported in media reports.

Kansas City, Mo.: Tenants win right to attorney in evictions

The growth of a militant tenant union in Kansas City, Mo., in the face of soaring rents and an inadequate supply of affordable housing, is credited with passage of an ordinance guaranteeing tenants a lawyer in eviction cases. KCTenants, an advocacy group, engages in both traditional lobbying and such militant actions as organizing rent strikes and protests outside judges' homes.

Austin, Texas: New laws delay evictions and offer right to organize

Two laws passed by the City allow tenants in five or more buildings owned by a single landlord an additional seven days to pay rent before eviciton proceedings; and allow tenants to invite others onto properties for the sake of organizing without fear of landlord retailiation. Owners who violate that law can be fined $500.

Michigan: Developers offered $50 million for affordable units

Michigan developers will be eligible to receive $50 million in funds available through the 2021 American Rescue Plan to construct or rehab affordable properties. Residents for the units will have incomes between 185 and 300 percent of the area's median income. The state has set a target of 75,000 units over the next five years.

Gainsville, Fla.: City ends exclusionary zoning

In a bitterly fought issue, the government, in a four-to-three decision, ended single-family zoning throughout the city, setting a possible precedent for the state. Single family-zoning has long been a major impediment to the construction of affordable housing.

Under the new rule, developers can build multi-unit dwellings. It is not yet known, however, if any new structure will be required to include a portion of the units at affordable rents. Further, opponents of the rule have threatened to file lawsuits against the ruling, and new commissioners next year may move to overturn the ruling.

Colorado: State will allocate $300 million annually for housing

A 52 percent majority of residents voted to approve an initiative which will allocate around $300 million a year for affordable housing over the next two decades.

Funding under the law will include supporting local governments' own projects on homelessness, and aiding essential workers like nurses and teachers in their efforts to buy houses. Advocates estimate that this steady stream of funding will generate around 170,000 small homes and rental units.

Local Housing Briefs

Landlord groups hope SCOTUS will usurp NYS pro-tenant act of 2019

Despite losing one lawsuit after another challenging the constitutionality of New York State's 2019 Housing Stability and Tenant Protection Act—which ended vacancy decontrol and srengthened other rent regulations—the city's landlord groups are gearing up for a final try: a suit before the United States Supreme Court.

They are hoping that the right wing majority that has sharply curtailed the civil rights era Voting Rights Act of 1965 and overturned the Roe v. Wade decision guaranteeing the right to abortion will rule that states have no constitutional right to impose laws on private properties, such as multi-unit buildings.

Adams seeks to end environmental reviews for some housing projects

In an effort to speed up housing construction, Mayor Adams wants to elminate environmental reviews for projects of 200 or fewer units, according to a report in Politico. Such reviews, pored over scrupiously by residents and city officials, include potential traffic congestion, school enrollment, sunlight blockages and other issues around new developments.

Most tenants facing eviction lack counsel

Notwithstanding a NYC law mandating the right of tenants facing eviction to be legally represented, more than 15,000 households have no representation in their eviction cases, and only 39 percent of tenants have lawyers, according to a study by ANHD and the Right to Counsel Coalition.

Homeless in NYC shelters over 39 K

Homeless people living in the city's shelters amounted to 39,136 in September. Additional homeless—those not living in shelters—reached over 61,000. Among the causes, according to the Coalition for the Homeless, were people being priced out of their housing and the influx of recent arrivals to the city.

104,000 NYC students were homeless last year

Excluding immigrants, students living in shelters, cars, abandoned buildings, sidewalks or, if "lucky," crashing with other households, totalled over 104,000 last school year. That was three percent more than the year before, according to the *NY Times*. The situation may be especially dire for students who seek shelter in sidewalk encampments; city agencies have cleared more than 1,500 of them as of mid-October.

New voucher reforms aim to help homeless avoid refuge in shelters

(Continued from page 1)

As reported by the Mayor's office, the CityPHEPS program entails the following reforms:

¶Expands CityFHEPS eligibility to include single adults working full-time on minimum wage, even if their income is slightly higher than 200 percent of the federal poverty level,

¶Reduces the monthly contribution by CityFHEPS tenants who move into single-room occupancy units from 30 percent of their income to a maximum of $50 per month,

¶Reduces the number of hours families are required to work to become eligible for CityFHEPS from 30 to 14 hours per week,

¶Covers the cost of apartment application fees for New Yorkers living in New York City Department of Homeless Services shelters,

¶Allows CityFHEPS voucher-holders who choose to secure an apartment that rents above the CityFHEPS maximum to utilize a voucher by paying up to 40 percent of their income,

¶Expands Supplemental Security Income eligibility for CityFHEPS families from an adult in the household to any household member, such as a child,

¶Pilots a limited bonus equal to one month's rent for landlords renting to CityFHEPS voucher-holders in high-cost neighborhoods,

¶Increases staffing at the New York City Department of Social Services (DSS) to speed up voucher processing and increase placements,

¶Increases New York City HRA staff presence in Housing Court to ensure eligible clients get quick access to financial assistance that will allow them to stay in their homes,

¶Creates consistency across CityFHEPS, Emergency Housing Vouchers (EHV), and the Special One-Time Assistance (SOTA) program by providing a "unit hold" incentive payment equal to one month's rent for landlords who agree to hold an apartment while an EHV holder or SOTA participant's materials are processed.

The Mayor's full release is available here.

From amusement park to 'utopia': the real story of Co-op City & its residents

(Continued from page 1)

who grew up there and eventually became a professor of history at Oberlin College, Co-op City was something else: an affordable boon for moderate-to-middle income people of every color in the city, a stable diverse bulwark *against* gentrification and racial displacement.

But above all, it was home.

Her home. Her *neighbors'* home. Her *community*.

A bulwark against displacement

This is not to say that the author is ignorant of, or even hostile to, the criticisms. Indeed, she not only describes them at length, she shares her own concerns. One example is the charge, partially true, that the development served to drain the economy of the Grand Concourse, which at an earlier time had been dubbed the Champs-Élysées of New York.

". . .as the months ticked by, Co-op City gradually transformed from a construction site to a community." --P.71

Nevertheless, what comes through so clearly in her pages is that the critics, none of whom lived in the giant co-op, are hardly capable of comprehending just how profoundly the working/moderate/middle class residents of the area formed, willy nilly, a vibrant community that eventually served—and still serves—to counter the rapid gentrification, displacement, and rent gouging that afflicts virtually every other neighborhood in the city: think Greenwich Village, Chelsea, Greenpoint, South Jamaica, Springfield Gardens, the Bowery (!) etc.

As the author notes on page 6: “The neighborhood is now a stable middle-income pocket of the city.”

Competence among chaos

The evolution of a set of buildings into a community—a goal of its founder, the United Housing Foundation, from the onset—is a running theme in the book. One example: during the horrific snow storm of February 8 and 9, 1969, the response of the city administration was "a debacle." Snow plows broke down, municipal agencies were fighting among themselves, garbage and snow piled up, citizens ignored emergency signs, etc.

But up north in Co-op City, the development was "an area of care and competence in a sea of chaos caused by the storm and its aftermath." Residents moved quickly to aid drivers who had skidded off the road, bringing travelers, including babies, back to one of the buildings, offering hot soup plus beds and couches to sleep on. And so much more.

This is not to say that the book is defensive or self-righteous. On the contrary, it includes a hard-nosed look into the daily lives of its inhabitants, who were often wont to vent their irritations with each other. Typical example: fears by elderly residents of youths whom they blamed for vandalism. And, inevitably, serious tensions between the early white, largely European Jewish population, and an incoming group of Black and Puerto Rican cooperators.

But even here, the standard assumptions of deep and unbridgeable racial conflicts are misleading. As the author notes, "the attempts to create a multiracial community in Co-op City were largely genuine *on all sides*, if never simple or unfraught." (Emphasis added.)

Historic rent strike

Several chapters are devoted to the enormous "rent" strike of the mid-1970s and its afermath, a strike motivated initially by delays in air conditioning, and eventually by crushing cost overruns. Precisely because the residents were cooperators, the overruns were borne by them, rather than by some distant landlord or developer.

A word about the term "rent" in this context: Technically, the cooperators did not pay rent, as legally defined. Rather, they paid carrying charges. Functionally, however, in the pocketbooks of the inhabitants, the difference was irrelevant.

Financial stability of the development was ultimately achieved as the 1980s wore on. Today, the complex is often touted as "The biggest housing bargain in town," the very title of chapter 7.

There is so much more to this book than can be hinted at in a review (e.g., a brief narrative of the land that became Freedomland.) Suffice it to say that it deserves a place of honor in any comprehensive collection of our city's history.

Read an interview with the author Annemarie Sammartino, conducted by Shelterforce.