

**Community Board 9
890 Nostrand Avenue
Brooklyn, New York 11225**

**Minutes of Housing Committee Meeting
September 9, 2015**

Attendance:

Committee Members: Carmen Martinez (Committee Chair); Patricia Moses; Unella Rhone-Perry; Eve-Lyn Williams
Community Residents: Neil Morancie; Donna Y. Mossman (Crown Heights Tenant Union); Elizabeth Mackin; Deborah Marcano; Suwen Cheong; Jay Sorid

Absent Members: Beverly Newsome (Excused) – CB9; Kenya Sollas – CB9; Paula Jones – Community Resident; Vivia Morgan-Frett – Community Resident; Cameron Page – Community Resident;

Meeting called to order by Carmen Martinez at 6:45PM

Following introduction of members and community residents in attendance, Chair Martinez thanked everyone for taking time to attend the meeting and indicated looking forward to working with everyone, and particularly housing and tenants' advocacy groups in the district to make the Housing Committee a resource for community residents moving forward. Carmen indicated that she envisioned the Committee being engaged in the community by each member committing to attend tenants' and block association meetings, and working closely with tenants that are currently facing problems and fighting for their rights. In particular, Carmen reported on having attended the candlelight vigil that was held at 285 Schenectady Avenue on September 2nd in support of the residents of that building and 1646 Union Street that in danger of being evicted if they don't agree to sign leases doubling and, in some cases, tripling their rents. This is due to the NYS Supreme Court ruling in favor of their landlord, Renaissance Realty Group, due to a loophole in the current rent laws that gives Renaissance the right to rent increases. Brooklyn Borough President Eric Adams, Assemblywoman Diana Richardson, Council Members Laurie Cumbo and Jumaane Williams attended the rally and others in the past. Copies of the September 3, 2015 article in Gothamist about the tenants' struggle were provided.

Carmen also reported having attended the August 31st tenants' association meeting at 265 Hawthorne Street, which is headed by CB 9 Member-at-Large Eve-Lyn Williams, whom she helped form the tenants' association in 1986, after the city confiscated the building following an arson fire that caused extensive damage. Eve-Lyn has been working on behalf of the tenants in the building ever since and Carmen explained that she is in need of the Committee's help in her current struggle to get the tenants to purchase their apartments. Eve-Lyn gave background information on the situation with the building and their ongoing fight with Pratt Area Community Council (PACC), the non-profit organization that currently manages the building. Eve-Lyn explained that when the city took over the building a second time due to the new landlord's failure to pay real estate taxes, they petition the city to become the owners of the building as a cooperative and she recommended PACC to manage the building because she believed that they would help the tenants but they in fact have worked against the tenants. After PACC and the city gave the tenants 90 days deadline to purchase their apartments, the tenants successfully sued the city and PACC. As it currently stand, in order for the building to become a co-op, by the end of this year, 80 percent of the tenants must be current on rent payments and sign purchase agreement. If that fails, PACC could get the building from the city for as little as \$1 and the tenants would face astronomical rent increases. The city spent \$8 million renovating the building and that cost would be tacked on to the tenants as Major Capital Improvement. There are new construction going on right across the street and down the block with rentals being advertised as high as \$4,000 so Eve-Lyn believes that the game plan is to get the tenants out of the building so the building can be converted to market rate rentals. Donna Y. Mossman offered advice on doing outreach to tenants and offered to help Ms. Williams. Carmen informed that Ms. Williams has also spoken with Assemblywoman Diana Richardson and Councilman Jumaane Williams, Chair of the Council's Committee on Housing and Buildings, to solicit their assistance in educating the tenants about the danger of losing their apartments if they do not meet the

deadline to purchase their apartments. Assemblywoman Richardson has indicated that she will work with Ms. Williams door knocking throughout the entire building as a way to do outreach to all of the residents. Ms. Mossman said she would participate as well, when it's scheduled.

Carmen pointed copies of the November 4, 2014 and November 30, 2014 blogs from *Bleached Out/A Blog About Brooklyn Housing Battle* on the table that gives background information on the plight of the tenants at 265 Hawthorne Street. The November 4th blog refers to Ms. Williams' initial and ongoing fight for the tenants' rights and the November 30th blog points out how real estate marketers often change the names of neighborhoods to make them more marketable. In the case of Hawthorne Street, in marketing the new townhouses at 280 Hawthorne Street, that section of Prospect Lefferts Gardens is referred to as "Heights Park".

Also made available to the committee members was a copy of the *New York Times* August 28, 2015 article: Homeless Families Endure Roaches, Mice and Failed Promises, which highlights horrible conditions under which the 64 homeless families the city placed in the 63-unit building at 60 Clarkson Avenue live, at a cost of nearly \$2,500 a month for housing and services per family.. The article singles out the plight of the family inside Apartment 6M, and the recent efforts to evict all of these families from the building. Assessing homelessness issues was listed among the draft of the Housing Committee's guidelines and mission. After discussions and input from Pat Moses, Donna and Elizabeth Mackin that mission was redefined as "The Committee will assess homelessness issues and monitor the services provided by unregulated, clustered sites, and three-quarter houses within the community".

Prior to excusing himself in order to attend another meeting, Mr. Neil Morancie handed in a note indicating that he would like to suggest that outreach to homeowners should also be a goal of the Committee. Taxes, lack of services, quality of life issues has become a particular problem, especially for seniors. Those goals are being incorporated.

Mr. Jay Sorid requested permission to address the Committee and he was given the floor. Mr. Sorid indicated that his organization is CHEFNA (Crown Heights East Flatbush Neighborhood Association). He complained that there is an oversaturation of social services to the homeless and mentally ill in this community, and now they plan to build an 8-story supportive housing project in a residential area on Maple Street & East New York Avenue, across from a charter school, a day care center. Despite claims that a resolution was passed by Community Board 9 at their September 2013 meeting, he claims that in fact it did not pass because with 30 members present, the vote was 15 yes, 14 no and 1 abstention. Additionally, that vote is also incorrect because he has spoken with Board member Simone Bennett and she indicated to him that she voted "no" but her vote was recorded as a "yes" in favor of the motion. Furthermore, Section 2800 of the City Charter, which deals with how votes go, requires that in order for a motion to pass the Yes votes must be greater than the No's and abstention combined. Mr. Sorid presented Carmen with copies of CB 9 2013-2014 Roll Call Voting, along with the list of the items that were voted on from June 25, 2013 thru October 22, 2013. The item Mr. Sorid refers to is the September 24, 2013 meeting vote on 829 Maple Street/918 East New York Avenue Mixed-Use Housing project presented by The Bridge.

Carmen indicated that she remembers Board Member Denise Mann bringing up that same issue during the June 2014 meeting at which officials from The Bridge were present. Mr. Sorid said that he has approached Denise about making a motion to rescind that resolution and she wouldn't. Mr. Sorid continued. "I'm asking you, as chair of the Housing Committee, if you would stand up at the next meeting and make a motion to rescind the resolution?" Carmen replied that she would not do such a thing simply based on his request and what he presented. Before she makes any motions, she needs to know exactly what she is talking about and after she has done her own research. Therefore, what she would do is, look into what Section 2800 says with regard to voting and, if indeed the votes were erroneously tabulated, she would consult with legal counsel to get an opinion as to how the matter can be properly addressed in order to correct the Board's records with regards to those votes. Mr. Sorid continued to press Carmen for a motion at the next meeting and Carmen reiterated what she said. Carmen asked Mr. Sorid to please bear with her and not to expect instant results but that she will look into the matter and will get back to him once she has obtained a legal opinion. Carmen provided Mr. Sorid with her email address, at his request.

Committee Member Unella Rhone-Perry brought up the issue of safety at Harry Silver Houses, which is near the above-referenced proposed project, due to young people hanging out and selling drugs. Security officers don't ask for ID, they just asks if they live there and if they say "yes" they are left free to roam around the property. She has asked the 71st Precinct about helping to alleviate the problem by asking these young people for ID when patrolling but has been told that due to the new "Stop and Frisk" policies, they are restricted from doing so without cause. Conversation was had about the tenants association instituting a policy that would require the security guards to ask for ID, and also the possibility of installing cameras throughout the building. Carmen suggested that they attend Councilman Mathieu Eugene's upcoming forum on Participatory Budget and perhaps they can submit proposal to obtain funding from the \$1 million to install cameras at Harry Silver House.

As the Committee moved on to continue deliberation on the draft of the Guidelines/Mission For Housing Committee, Carmen pointed out a list she had prepared of 46 construction project completed, under construction and pending within CB 9 and cautioned that it is just a partial list, as there are many within the neighboring district that are not included. Reference was made to 961 Washington Avenue, a 4-story rent-stabilized residential building whose landlord had just filed plans to expand the building to 11-stories and from 40 units to 70, and the fact that a similar plan was in the making for 85 Eastern Parkway which the tenants fought against. Carmen mentioned that one of the Committee's mission will be to collect information on new construction and rehabilitation projects, and aim to maintain an updated list of these projects to keep the community informed. Ms. Mackin indicated that Concerned Citizens maintains a list of construction project, which Suwen Cheong confirmed. Mr. Sorid also indicated that on the NYC Department of Building's website, there's a tab "Look at Building on My Block" that allows you to see new buildings, demolitions going on in your community board. Carmen thanked Ms. Mackin, Mr. Cheong and Mr. Sorid for sharing such valuable information.

In comparing the draft of the existing Housing Committee responsibility with the new draft and how to merge both to become a comprehensive working document, the Committee concluded that the existing "Develop plans for the preservation and upgrading of the community's housing stock" and "Review vacant buildings in the neighborhood to assess need for seal-up or demolition" will be merged to read.. "Identify and review vacant buildings in the neighborhood and develop plans for their preservation and rehabilitation as a means of upgrading and maintaining the community's affordable housing stock". Discussed examples of current vacant buildings such as the one at Parkside Avenue & Parkside Court, next to the Pioneer Supermarket (205 Parkside Avenue), and a building at New York Avenue and Hawthorne Street.

All agenda items were completed and meeting adjourned at 8:35PM

Submitted by Carmen L. Martinez, Chair

September 18, 2015