

# The Brooklyn Paper

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## Landlord and tenants face off

By Dana Rubinstein

*The Brooklyn Paper*

A high-octane development company that bought two rent-subsidized buildings in Fort Greene is fighting back against charges that it is trying to push out tenants to make room for bigger-bucks residents.

Tenants contend that the Dermot Company — which partnered with Magic Johnson to transform the Williamsburgh Savings Bank tower into million-dollar condos — has neglected other buildings they own nearby in an effort to make current residents move.

But Dermot principal Andrew MacArthur insists that his staff is doing the best it can, given the rundown condition the buildings were in when his firm acquire them.

“At 266 Washington Ave., we have completed 245 work orders in 11 months on occupied apartments,” said MacArthur. “At 99 Lafayette Ave., which we’ve had for a lot less time, we’ve done 115 work orders on occupied apartments.”

Dermot purchased the 77-unit apartment house on Lafayette Avenue in February for \$12.8 million, and the 113-unit Washington Avenue building last October for \$19.5 million, according to city records.

Since then, tenants say they’ve been neglected.

Kim Longsworth, a 33-year Washington Avenue resident, said she’s been subject to intense pressure to move out. “They’re doing anything and everything to make the lives of long-time tenants miserable — but I have no intention of going,” she said.

Longsworth claims Dermot is more than nine months behind on several repairs to her apartment. MacArthur counters that she hasn’t let his staff into her apartment to make the repairs.

Bob Foster, renters association head and a 40-year resident — who pays \$900 a month for his two-bedroom apartment — said he does not like the company’s new system for receiving repair requests — they must go through Dermot, and not directly to the super.

MacArthur countered that the system allows Dermot to keep track of repairs.

Ten blocks away, at the Lafayette Avenue building, between South Oxford Street and South Portland Avenue, 16-year tenant Shantella Jackson said, “Dermot is not accepting some of the tenants’ rents [and] they’re slapping notices on people’s doors announcing that they’re taking them to court.”

Dermot responded that it is simply making sure that tenants aren’t milking the

system by incorrectly claiming their apartments as primary residences — and then subleasing them to others for a profit.

Councilwoman Letitia James (D–Fort Greene) says she has met with the company twice. “Dermot is interested in co-opting apartments and turning them into high-end condos,” she said. “This will continue to change the diversity of Downtown Brooklyn, both racially and economically.”

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