

Brooklyn



Brooklyn Tenants Band Together To Keep Housing Affordable

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It's been called a real estate boom and the "Mahattanization" of Brooklyn, but as more and more neighborhoods in the borough become gentrified, long-time residents are feeling the push. Now they're looking for ways to fight back. NY1's Jeanine Ramirez filed the following report.

They may live in different buildings, in different neighborhoods, but some Brooklyn tenants share a common fear – displacement.

They gathered for a town hall meeting organized by local elected officials and housing advocates Wednesday night in Fort Greene to share their complaints and seek help.

"You have an affordable housing crisis that began in Fort Greene and it's sweeping eastward through Clinton Hill into Bedford Stuyvesant," said Brooklyn Assemblyman Hakeem Jeffries. "What started in Prospect Heights is sweeping eastward into Crown Heights, and long-term residents are being put out by landlords who are seeing dollar signs."

Tenants here say they're being forced out of their rent controlled and rent-stabilized homes by new landlords who are transforming them into luxury apartments. They claim they're being harassed with all sorts of tactics, from frivolous lawsuits to challenges to their leases, to being denied basic repairs.

"We're also being forced to allow them to come into our apartments to accommodate the luxury apartments, letting them take away our closet space to put in new pipes to accommodate the kitchen area of the newly renovated apartments," said Shantella Jackson, another area resident.

Jackson's been living in a rent-stabilized apartment at 99 Lafayette for 16 years. She says her problems began when the building was bought by the Dermot Company in February. The same developer also owns 266 Washington, where many long-time residents shared similar stories.

City Councilwoman Letitia James says she's trying to help.

"[I'm here] to see if the pattern and practice is illegal, and whether or not we can file some sort of claim against some of these landlords who have engaged in these abuses," said James.

The Dermot Company says the buildings were in great disrepair, and it's completed hundreds of work orders to improve the properties. But these tenants said are unimpressed.

The advice from elected officials and housing advocates is that tenants should be fighting landlords collectively, rather than individually.

"If you're in apartment A and they come for you, and someone is in apartment B, it's only a matter of time before they come for that person in apartment B," said Jeffries.

Officials say the tenants targeted most are senior citizens, the disabled and those living on a fixed income.

- *Jeanine Ramirez*