

Island House Tenants Association
NEWSLETTER

Number #2/November 5, 2004

UPDATES

Fundraising

The Island House Tenants Association would like to thank all those who donated to our initial fundraising drive. Close to \$8,000.00 was raised over the course of two weekends in August and September. A portion of that amount has been applied to the down payment for legal representation as well as to the incorporation of the Tenants Association. As a legal entity, we are now better able to work on your behalf.

Lawyer Meeting

On Wednesday, October 22, Paul Gangsei and Arlo Chase, from the law firm of Manatt, Phelps and Phillips, met with Island House residents in the auditorium of P.S./I.S. 217.

Among those in attendance were Jessica Lappin, District Chief of Staff to Council Speaker Gifford Miller, and Tony Morenzi, District Office Manager for Assemblyman Pete Grannis.

After a presentation outlining the history of Mitchell-Lama housing as well as their experience in striking an accord between the landlord and tenants at Independence Plaza, Gangsei and Chase answered questions from the audience. The topics included the conditions for the extension of the ground lease; the end of the tax abatement in November 2005; the possible filing of a temporary restraining order to halt the extension of the ground lease; and the IHTA's relationship with Westview.

Chase spoke about the role the Division of Housing and Community Renewal (DHCR) will play in the future of Island House. DHCR approved the recent change in management from Belson Associates to Sheldrake/Blackwell Management--a change

that includes an intent on the part of Sheldrake to buy both Island House and Westview. This sale cannot move forward without the extension of the ground lease or sanction from DHCR.

Gangsei and Chase noted that while tenants cannot prevent an upcoming change in ownership, they can influence the terms under which it is brought to fruition. Both lawyers stressed the importance of enlisting our political representatives to aid us in our cause.

Gangsei and Chase stressed, as well, that a motivated, active and focused tenancy is key to effecting changes that will benefit us all.

Chase addressed the possibility of a tenant-sponsored buy-out, wherein the Tenants Association sponsors the purchase of the building, enters in to a contract for sale and then sells the units to tenants. He noted that this would be an expensive and difficult endeavor and that filing the initial papers to the Attorney General's office alone would cost \$20,000.00.

Tony Morenzi of Assemblyman Grannis' office urged caution upon the tenancy, indicating that moving too quickly on any one course of action might not be in the best interests of Island House residents. He stated that all options for the future of Island House should be explored thoroughly and then put on the table for consideration by the tenancy.

The discussion about a tenant-sponsored buyout was followed with questions about the possibility of a rental arrangement with increases based on rent stabilization. This led to questions about the feasibility of either scenario, other possible options, and whether a single, definite goal should be set to insure the best outcome for all of the tenants. Before deciding on any specific course of action, it is vital to ascertain the will of the tenancy.

Tenant Survey

Among the IHTA's chief priorities is to take

the pulse of the tenancy regarding our future course of action. Once that is determined, the IHTA will set a clear direction and focus our energies to that end.

It should be noted that this will be a preliminary survey. The answers given *in no way* commit you to a specific plan of action, though they will influence the work of the committee.

Your input is vital to our cause.

Look for the survey on your doorstep soon.

The Future

A period of transition breeds anxiety. The advent of the building's new management company, Blackwell Management, LLC, will bring changes that we can't pretend to know. The only certain thing is that IHTA is dedicated to working on your behalf.

Utmost among our goals is transparency of purpose: We will not keep the tenancy in the dark about events that affect each and every one of us.

We are in the process of establishing an IHTA website. It will afford the TA the opportunity to publish news of significant developments in our situation almost instantaneously, as well as allow residents the opportunity to pose questions or give suggestions via e-mail about the future of our building. The website will be set up to insure the privacy of the tenants. A newsletter will be posted in the lock boxes located in the lobby for those who don't have access to a computer.

FYI

On page B6 of the October 29th edition of *The New York Times* there appeared an article on the Tenant Empowerment Act, a new tenants' rights bill aimed at preserving affordable housing. If passed, the bill would guarantee the right of tenants to band together to buy the building from the owner should it be taken out of the Mitchell-Lama program, or the tenants could choose a nonprofit group to buy the building and

continue the rental assistance.

If the abundance of recent news stories on the fate of the Mitchell-Lama program (our building was established under Mitchell-Lama), affordable housing for poor and middle-income New Yorkers looks to be a significant issue in the upcoming mayoral election. Both Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg and City Council Speaker Gifford Miller have, in recent weeks, come out in favor of affordable housing, though they have not necessarily seen eye-to-eye on the best way to preserve it.

In the weeks to come, the IHTA will provide the names and addresses of governmental figures to whom letters can be sent. Your opinion is important. Make your voice heard!

Your Involvement

The secret to an effective tenants association is an involved tenancy. Many of you have signed up for various duties, eager to help us in this cause. Those wanting to serve as floor captains, hand out fliers or engage in political demonstrations are invited to contact the IHTA by e-mail at ihta-steering@islandhouse.us or by slipping a note in the IHTA box at the door station.

As for financial contributions: Not only are they welcome, they are a *necessity*. In order to pay our lawyers each month we will be developing an ongoing plan for fundraising. Without your financial help we cannot explore the options that will best allow us to stay in our homes!

Please remember: You can always drop a check, made out to the "Island House Tenants Association", and leave it at the door station in an envelope to the attention of Joan Brooks, 575 Main Street, #1908.

Steering Committee

Katherine E. Berman*Amrah Cardoso
Paul Doganges*Lee Edelman
Renato Folla*Tim Johns*Alan Levy
Harriet Lieber*Mario Naves
Audrey Berman Tannen