

BEDFORD + BOWERY



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BY ROB SCHER

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Affordable Housing Group Is ‘Strategically Hitting’ Seven Landlords



Brandon Kielbasa and Mike Ward

Stabilizing NYC, a citywide coalition aimed at combatting tenant harassment and preserving affordable housing, met earlier today on the steps of City Hall to announce the list of landlords they will be targeting in an upcoming legal battle against “predatory equity.”

“We’re strategically hitting landlords who’ve been displacing thousands of tenants every year,” said Brandon Kielbasa, lead organizer at Cooper Square Committee, a tenant rights

organization running since 1959.

“These landlords have been buying up dozens of buildings with big loans from private investors and driving out rent regulated tenants in an attempt to often double and triple rents, a lot of the time using illegal means to do so. It’s what we refer to as predatory equity,” said Kielbasa.

The list includes Alma Realty Corp, Benedict Realty Group (BRG), Coltown Properties, Icon, SMRC Management, Steve Croman and Ved Parkash.

“In most communities it largely comes down to a debt to income ratio,” explained Cathy Dang, executive director of CAAAV, a Chinatown organization dedicated to empowering Asian immigrants. “They [landlords] are paying too much for the buildings, putting in too much debt, taking out investment from private equity companies and planning to make a profit that’s not sustainable.”

Some of the harassment tactics associated with this practice have included “tacking on fees,” “manipulating rent stabilization laws” and in certain extreme cases, “if they can’t make their money by pushing the tenants out, just starving the building,” said Dang.

Christopher Dobrowolski, a tenant of 128 Second Avenue for 27 years, said he could attest. “We’ve been through quite a bit of hell,” he said. “There’s been no cooking gas since March and for many weeks, no heat or hot water,” he said of the building, the owner of which faced lawsuits

brought by Sage Restaurant and by residential tenants in the wake of the East Village gas explosion.

Dobrowolski said he faces his own legal battle against Icon, who refuses to renew his rent-stabilized lease. “Instead of sending me my lease, they sent me an eviction notice and then took me to court, fabricating false accusations that I ran a hotel out of my apartment.”

“Usually the way rent regulation works is that the longer you stay, the more you’re protected and the lower your rent is,” said Kielbasa. “These landlords are targeting people like Dobrowolski — the real fabric of the community — who’ve been in their buildings a long time and have deep roots in the community.”



Stabilizing NYC press conference, City Hall

The need for community lies at the heart of Stabilizing NYC, comprised of 14 grassroots neighborhood-based organizations, a legal services provider and citywide housing advocacy organizations.

“We want to sound off and let these landlords know that this is not an individual neighbourhood-by-neighborhood battle. The tenants of New York City are organized and there’s a movement that’s going to be pushing back against them,” said Dang, to cheers from the assembled crowd.

Dang went on to explain the coalitions “tri-prong approach,” entailing “litigation with the landlords,” “policy through legislation” and “organizing the thousands of tenants of New York City to fight back against the landlords.”



Council Member Williams (photo: Rob Scher)

“It’s all about the almighty dollar too often, and that is in exchange for living conditions of human beings and right now we say no to that,” said City Council member Jumaane D. Williams, who along with City Council members Dan Garodnick, and Ben Kallos, came out in support against predatory equity landlords. “Human capital is the most important thing that we have in this city of New York and we want to make sure that everybody has the ability to live in an affordable unit and have protections against arbitrary evictions and to live in a unit fit for a human to occupy.”

With the Rent Guidelines Board voting on [guidelines for rent stabilized apartments](#) later this month, members from Stabilizing NYC turned to face City Hall as the press conference wrapped up, ensuring their message was heard loud and clear. “This is the month of the tenants, this is the year of the tenants, we figured today was the perfect time to announce the landlords that we’re going after,” said Dang.



(photo: Rob Scher)

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