

Mt. Vernon United Tenants, Inc.



Mail: P. O. Box 2107 ~ Office: 2 Gramatan Avenue, Suite 304 ~ Mt. Vernon, N. Y. 10551
Phone (914) 699-1114 ~ Fax (914) 699-7449
Email: mvut@erols.com

Westchester Rent Guidelines Board (WRGB)
Public Hearing
Mt. Vernon City Hall – Council Chambers
Wednesday - June 15 - 7:00 pm

Can't afford any more rent increases? Then come to the *WRGB* Hearing at Mt. Vernon City Hall and tell the Board to **FREEZE RENTS**. Tenants are being priced out of their homes so that landlords can get rich.

**Come out Wednesday, June 15th and say:
No More Increases!!**

(To speak at the *Hearing* call 948-4434 the day of the *Hearing*.)

Call *MVUT* at 699-1114, ext. 306 if you need help with your talking points or need further information.

*Note: The *WRGB* will hold additional *Public Hearings* and the final *Public Meeting* (when the Guidelines will be set), all at 7:00 pm, as follows:

Monday - June 6, *Public Hearing*, White Plains Public Library,
100 Martine Avenue, White Plains.

Wednesday - June 8, *Public Meeting*, Westchester District Rent
Office, 75 South Broadway – Suite 350, White Plains.

Monday - June 20, *Public Meeting*, White Plains Public Library,
100 Martine Avenue, White Plains. Presentation by Tenant and
Landlord Members – Discussion/Rebuttals and setting of Final
Guidelines.

Wednesday - June 22, *Public Meeting*, White Plains City Hall, 255
Main Street, White Plains. (If necessary).

(SEE OVER)

The Journal News Sunday

SUNDAY, MAY 22, 2016 PART OF THE USA TODAY NETWORK

Cry of cronyism creates crisis



PHIL REISMAN
COMMENTARY

The cause for affordable housing suffered a setback with the sudden resignations of the two tenant representatives on the Westchester County Rent Guidelines Board.

Both tenant members — the Rev. Emma Jean Loftin-Woods and Genevieve Harris Roche — said in separate letters that they were quitting because the decision-making process is stacked against apartment renters.

Rosenblatt to serve as a public member of the nine-member rent board. Rosenblatt is a counsel for Rosenberg & Estes — one of the largest real estate law firms in New York City.

Rosenblatt had also previously served as general counsel for the rent board and “was very much respected by all of us,” Roche wrote. However, she said it was “decidedly inappropriate” for him to be a public member because so much of his career “has been spent in a variety of positions primarily serving the interests of landlords.”

The rent board consists of two tenant advocates, two landlord representatives and five public members, all of whom are appointed by the Board of Legislators with the oversight of the state. They serve four-year terms.

The public members are supposed to be impartial, a requirement that puts them under scrutiny. From time to time, a public member’s objectivity is called into serious question — and this is one of those times.

Rosenblatt was recommended by the HCR and approved in a 13-3 vote by the Board of Legislators, which, Roche charged, “effectively resulted in there now being three landlord representatives on the board, not the two contemplated by (law).”

Reached at his Greenburgh home, Rosenblatt said: “I feel very bad that both Genevieve and Emma are both leaving the board because I have nothing but the utmost respect for their abilities and their dedication to working for the rights of their constituents.

“Of course, having left, Genevieve is what, if any, rent increases will be given to approximately 25,000 rent-stabilized apartments in 20 communities — among them Yonkers, Mount Vernon, New Rochelle and White Plains.

It’s safe to say that most people don’t even know of the rent board’s existence. Nevertheless, it serves a critical dual-function: It dictates the profit margins for apartment building owners as well as the household budgets for thousands of middle-class rent payers.

Lots of money is at stake, which means that every percentage point, up or down, is fought over amid a dizzying recitation of competing statistics covering such vagaries as the cost of heating oil, water, building maintenance, property taxes and inflation as calculated by the Consumer Price Index.

Albert Anunziata, the executive director of the pro-landlord Building and Realty Institute of Westchester/Mid-Hudson Region, said the determination of rent guidelines is inevitably consumed by politics. As a result, rent board hearings can get very emotional — even in sedate Westchester. In the case of New York City, the atmosphere can be as threatening as a mosh pit and sometimes they have to call the cops.

Last year, the Westchester board passed rent increases of 1.75 percent for one-year leases and 2.75 percent for two-year leases.

Roche has been a fierce tenant advocate, but her resignation leaves only Loftin-Woods to carry the flag when the first of six meetings starts in Yonkers on June 1.

Anunziata said he was “shocked” return under one condition. Rosenblatt must first step down.

He won’t. “No,” he said, “I have no intention of doing that.”

(See Over)