

Condo Conversions Regulated

continued ▲ from Front

The fast track conversions were made possible because the city never enforced a 1980 ordinance requiring 120-day notice to the renters impacted by the loss of their living spaces.

Now tenants have more protections through a new state law clarifying that all tenants will get a 120-day notice to move, with penalties for landlords who clear out a building to avoid the waiting period or who excessively increase rent.

According to Ian Slingerland of the Community Alliance of Tenants, owners frequently use a no-cause 30-day eviction to clear their buildings for developers and to avoid the longer notice.

"Sometimes they simultaneously give an eviction and notice," he said. "Tenants didn't usually have resources to challenge this and it was never litigated."

The new law offers renters an option.

"If tenants get eviction notices and they think it's from conversion, they can stay and challenge it," Slingerland said, "or they can move and pay attention. If within a year it's converted, they can sue for six months' rent."

Tenants will also enjoy a less tumultuous housing transition, since the new law limits when construction work can take place in apartment common areas. It will also ensure tenants the opportunity to purchase their units during the 120-day period.

The city's old ordinance offered tenants a separate, 60-day opportunity to consider buying their units, but Slingerland said tenants either weren't being alerted or were only notified of the purchasing option after they were displaced.

Between 2005 and 2006 the number of condominiums in Multnomah County increased by 400 percent. Many are in north and northeast Portland where residents are already being displaced by gentrification.

State Reps. Tina Kotek and Chip Shields, representing north and northeast Portland in Salem, were major proponents of the new condo conversion law.

Rep Shields said his district saw the most conversion filings last year - 17 compared to four in 2005.

Slingerland said the new law doesn't address the problem of condo conversions on existing residents, but mitigates the impact so folks can maintain stability for their families.

The new law, which takes effect Jan. 1, was scaled down from when it was introduced. The alliance originally pushed for a requirement that developers pay three months' rent, a big issue with realtor and homebuilding organizations.

Portland real estate attorney Howard Feuerstein helped lead the opposition to a more sweeping conversion law. He said the new restrictions aren't entirely fair but believes developers can manage.

"This creates obstacles and difficulties

for people who want to convert, but doesn't make it impossible," he said.

Feuerstein said the new law likely won't slow down condo conversions, but it may have a temporarily negative impact on market conditions if developers rush to conversion between now and the end of the year, in order to avoid the new rules.

Meanwhile, the city ordinance that was never enforced also required \$500 in moving assistance for low-income renters.

Commissioner Randy Leonard's office is working on a new ordinance that would update and enforce the law on a local level, plus require building owners to pay tenants two months' rent for relocation.

Anna DiBenedetto, a representative with Leonard's office, said they hope to present a condo conversion ordinance to council by the end of the summer.

The condo issue has personally affected DiBenedetto; in March 2006 she and at least 150 other tenants were dis-



Three high-rise buildings comprise the Harrison condominiums in southwest Portland, displacing residents of the old Portland Center Apartments. The condos sell for \$200,000 to \$500,000.

placed from their building at Portland Center Apartments in southwest Portland. The owner gave them 30 days' notice to make way for the existing Harrison Condominiums, a set of three neighboring towers that now fetch as much as a half a million dollars per unit.

DiBenedetto said she felt disenfranchised because, although she was in a position to buy a condo, the owner expressed no interest in guiding that process.

"I was working with a broker," she said, "but when the time came for the 30-days notice they were absolutely silent."

When DiBenedetto's landlord charged tenants for damages after being told they would not, she challenged them with a letter, pointing out that reconstruction would cancel out any harm she may have done to the units.

She was instantly refunded, but knew that others, like her 100-year-old neighbor, were likely to just pay the unnecessary bill.

DiBenedetto now owns a home, but knowing that many others don't have the money to bounce back from displacement doesn't sit well with her.



PHOTO BY MARK WASHINGTON/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Northeast Church Hosts Farm Stand

Kao and Johnny Lor sell freshly cut flowers each Sunday at Redeemer Lutheran Church at Northeast 20th Avenue and Killingsworth Street. The father and son are part of the Northeast Neighborhood Farm Stand, an Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon effort to support local refugee and immigrant farmers and to provide fresh, healthy food for the community.

Film Documents Mumia Case for Justice

Discussion to follow screening

A film showing of "Mumia: A Case for Reasonable Doubt?" will be hosted by the Freedom Socialist Party and Radical Women on Tuesday, July 24 at 7 p.m. at the Bread and Roses Center, 819 N. Killingsworth Ave.

This 1997 documentary analyzes the frame-up and prosecution of Mumia Abu Jamal, a radical commentator and former Black Panther, for the death of a Philadelphia police officer. Considered a political prisoner for 25 years, Mumia's case now stands at a crossroads as the U.S. Court of Appeals considers whether to set an execution date, continue his sentence or grant him a new trial.

The film will be followed by discussion and plans for immediate community action in response to the court ruling.

Donation of \$2 will be accepted at the door and refreshing snacks will be served for a sliding scale donation of \$5 to \$10. Proceeds will benefit Mumia's Legal Defense Fund and the Freedom Socialist Newspaper Fund Drive.

For information, call 503-240-4462.

Clinic Positioned to Help Underinsured

continued ▲ from Front

The clinic's reduced costs for services are threatened by financial difficulties. Hicks recently sent out an e-mail fundraising plea revealing that the clinic had only about a month's worth of operating revenue in its coffers.

The financial bind forced Hicks to lay off one of the remaining two nurse prac-

tioners and to reduce the number of hours that the clinic is open.

"It's still a dire situation," she says.

The clinic now has about a two-month financial window, and Hicks thinks that a surge in donations will push the organization through the tumultuous changes.

With 60 to 75 percent of the clinic's revenue historically coming from large donations, Taylor sees the clinic's failure to hire a grant writer this year as crucial. "I wish them well," she says, "but it's too little too late."

The clinic's non-profit board-of-directors chair argues that Taylor's firing was a necessary evil.

"Of the three major changes in the last year, that was the hardest," Bud Bylsma says, "but we had to do what we had to do."

Both sides agree that an impasse resulted from Taylor's insistence on providing comprehensive

health care, not from the quality of health care provided. The Downtown Lion's "Pride of Portland" plaque given to Taylor in 1999 remains displayed in the patient waiting room.

Using Taylor's rich legacy, Hicks wants to find new ways to make a greater variety of subsidized services financially viable. "Even for families with an insurance benefit, adding your children is generally an additional cost, and for the working poor, that additional cost may be well beyond their reach," she says.

Taylor puts it another way. She asks, "Until we get universal access to health care, where else are they going to go?"

"Trust the people that are there," Taylor adds. "They're going to do the best they can."

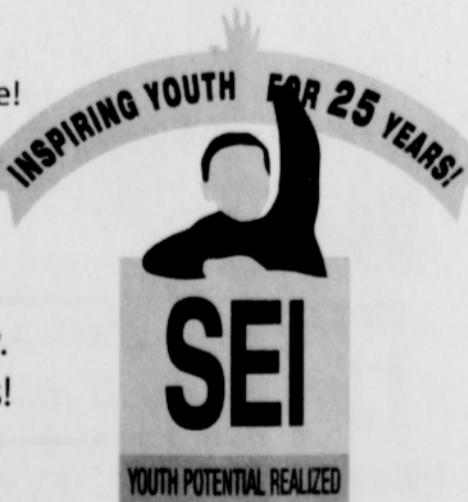
Without any direct involvement with the clinic's controversial changes, Hicks deems herself well positioned to "move forward." "Right now we're doing a lot of housecleaning, as you can imagine," she says. "We're looking forward to greatness."

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