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Torrington Properties tenant association finalizes five-year affordable contract with landlord

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Boston, MA The sale of buildings too commonly triggers an endless torrent of rent increases and housing instability, significantly now as we recover from the pandemic. But this same force has empowered a wave of tenant organizing and collective negotiations that just resulted in a finalized five-year agreement with capped rent increases at Torrington Properties in the Jamaica Plain neighborhood of the city at 253 Hyde Park Ave.

The Torrington Properties TA of Hyde Park Ave. consists of two buildings with 52 units down the street from the public transit artery, the Forest Hills Orange Line train station, and public bus hub. Many tenants in The Torrington Properties TA are Black and Hispanic Latinos from the Caribbean and Central America; some have been there for 20-40 years. At the beginning of 2019, CLVU started to knock on the doors of these 52 units after identifying them as being among the last affordable buildings near Forest Hills in deep need of repairs. Interestingly enough, in 2019 Jay Bisogno from Torrington Properties purchased the two buildings on 253-261 and 280 Hyde Park Ave., and tried increasing rents, making Hyde Park Ave. an organizing priority at CLVU. Before the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted thousands of lives, Torrington Properties and the Torrington TA reached an informal agreement with the support of CLVU. Torrington Properties decided to allow the status quo of the informal agreement to remain during the pandemic and reopened negotiations earlier this year. Many tenants received unaffordable rent increases right after the purchase, pricing people out. Now they will celebrate a collective bargaining agreement, which features controlled rent increases.

There are a total of 52 units collectively in the two Torrington buildings, all of which will benefit from the negotiation. The newly won contract establishes five-year leases for all residents in the Torrington apartment complex with a rent increase of 3% per year after an initial bump in rent to \$1,400 for a one-bedroom and \$1,700 for a two-bedroom and a 2% per year rent increase for residents now paying higher “market” rents. Torrington committed to not increasing rents over the payment standard for current and new Section 8 tenants.

“At a time when many real estate corporations are pushing rents through the roof, this corporation at Torrington Properties decided to negotiate a fair rent,” said Zafiro Patino, Jamaica Plain CLVU organizer.

“Even though there were disagreements,” she says, “a collective bargaining agreement was finalized that stabilizes tenants and ensures good long-term tenants at Torrington Properties.”

Legal aid attorney Maggie Gribben of Greater Boston Legal Services supported the tenants association in the negotiations, helping draft, and refine the agreement. The negotiations came after four years of door-knocking 52 doors, organizing protests, organizing in-person and online meetings before and during COVID, and organizing negotiations.

This negotiation is one example of housing stability achieved by collective bargaining and organizing by a tenant association and a property owner willing to come to the table. Tenants have reached many successful agreements in the Greater Boston areas in the past few years, such as the 5-year agreement won by United Properties Tenant Association in Malden and Morton Village Tenant Association in Mattapan. City Life/Vida Urbana and tenant associations across the state continue to demand a lift on the statewide ban on rent control to stabilize rent and housing stability to homes across the state. Lifting the ban on rent control will protect thousands of tenants facing exorbitant rent increases who cannot reach CLVU on time to learn how to fight back and negotiate. We need to lift the ban on rent control and pass rent control in towns across MA to prevent having to engage in individual fights for countless buildings where tenants face excessive rent increases.

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