



DAILY NEWS

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YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD



Buildings of their own

Tenants buying Mitchell-Lama complex

WHEN WILLIE Mae Anderson and her family moved into one of the brand-new Cathedral Parkway Towers on W. 110th St. in the early 1970s, she thought it was grand.

"It was just a beautiful building," she remembered.

Then the facade started crumbling. There were problems with the heat and the intercoms.

After 20 years of rent strikes and battles with the former owner, the tenants are buying the Mitchell-Lama complex and keeping it affordable housing for middle-income New Yorkers.

City, state and federal officials celebrated the unusual deal with tenants last week at a party in the complex's courtyard.

Under the Mitchell-Lama program, property owners got tax breaks for building housing geared to middle-income New Yorkers. After 20 years, the owners are allowed to charge market-rate rents.

The Cathedral Parkway deal is a hopeful sign for housing advocates who are trying to hold on to what is seen as the last affordable housing for middle-income New Yorkers.

Anderson, a 73-year-old tenant organizer who went on to help manage the building, said it's been a long, hard road.

BY LISA L. COLANGELO
DAILY NEWS CITY HALL BUREAU

The tenants continued to work with the state Division of Housing and Community Renewal. The original owners sold out their interest. With the blessing of state officials and tenants, developer Robert Nelson stepped in to oversee an \$8 million reconstruction plan.

The last piece was financing. The Community Preservation Corp. provided a temporary \$28 million loan to pay off debt and

the reconstruction project. A \$35 million loan — funded by city worker pensions, including police and teachers — bought the temporary loan and paid off all other debts.

"There's nothing not to like about it," Nelson said about the deal. "We were able to keep it in the Mitchell-Lama program, and we were able to maintain affordable homeownership on Manhattan's upper West Side."

Rents will stay affordable — \$889 for a studio, \$1,243 for a one-bedroom apartment — for people who stay within certain income limits. And there are programs to help existing tenants who need help paying rent.

Angela Rooks remembers walking into the building for the first time in 1975.

"I was 9 years old, and we had come from a five-story walkup," she said. "I remember thinking we were walking into great luxury."

Rooks works with Anderson to help manage the property on behalf of the tenants, a right they won after the rent battles of the 1970s.

"What I'm doing now is training the young people," Anderson said, "so that we can keep this and keep it affordable."

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