



Brooklyn Center residents concerned over future of apartment complex

Kate Schlauch and Yavonne Dingivan didn't know each other before a few months ago. They both live in the Shingle Creek Towers in Brooklyn Center and they both moved into the affordable housing complex less than a year ago.

"We're your typical community," said Schlauch, who enjoys the central location of the complex.

The apartment building is only a short walk from the library, community center and nearby shopping centers. But it was imperative for Schlauch to have affordable rent to accommodate her high insurance premiums and medical costs associated with her disability.

"I wanted affordable housing that was safe and maintained," said Schlauch. "The northern suburbs have very little in terms of affordable housing for combination of seniors, disability low income folks."

Yavonne Dingivan also was in search of affordable housing, but she had something else attracting her to the Shingle Creek property--her mother. Dingivan's grandmother and mother moved into the complex in the early 1980s. When her grandmother passed away, her mother decided to stay.

"All the time my mother has been here, it's been nice and kept up," said Dingivan.

Foreclosed

Both women were shocked when they got a notice the building was in foreclosure and up for sale. The former owners of the property, BOCA Limited Partnership in Eagan, stopped making payments, so the department of Housing and Urban development which subsidized the property, decided to foreclose on the property.

"I never realized this place would be in jeopardy," said Dingivan. "I thought our rents were controlled."

Then, news got worse. The women learned the highest bidder for the property at the April auction was a landlord from New York City with a bad reputation.

"He's a notorious slumlord in New York," said Dingivan. Schlauch calls the landlord, Emmanuel Ku, a "renegade landlord."

Emmanuel Ku offered \$2.8 million to buy the property. Ku has a laundry list of housing violations and fines from the 13 properties he owns in New York. Ku is now placing bids on similar HUD foreclosed properties in other states, including two properties in Minnesota.

Outside help

Residents used this information to catch the attention of housing advocate Eric Hauge.

"Residents feel like it's unacceptable to put the fate of their homes that have been affordable in the fate of a possible slumlord and that HUD can just allow this to happen," said Hauge.

Hauge works for Home Link, a nonprofit group which advocates for renters. The group is currently petitioning officials at Housing and Urban Development not to auction off the property at an inflated price, like Emmanuel Ku's bid. Residents believe this would definitely make rent go up.

"HUD has the power to do the right thing and we need to make sure that happens," said Hauge.

The residents and Home Link are also part of a lawsuit against HUD that will ensure affordable housing properties that are foreclosed and auctioned off will remain affordable housing units.

"We lose a lot of the protections that HUD currently affords if the sale goes through," said Schlauch.

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What's next?

Residents are optimistic the Department of Housing and Urban Development will listen and not sell the property to a landlord at an inflated rate. The estimated timeline for when the sale will go through is unknown.

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