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OP-ED

Climate Mobilization Act is a disaster for owners of affordable cooperatives

BY BOB FRIEDRICH

The intent of Local Law 97, also known as the Climate Mobilization Act, is admirable. It calls for most buildings of more than 25,000 square feet to meet new energy efficiency and greenhouse gas emissions limits by 2024, with stricter limits going into effect by 2030.

Unfortunately, it endangers the affordability of co-op housing. The co-ops that line the outer boroughs are the last bastion of truly affordable housing in New York. The Manhattan-centric City Council views all co-ops as multimillion-dollar prewar residences on Fifth Avenue or high-rises near Billionaires Row. But the overwhelming majority of affordable New York co-ops can be purchased for less than \$300,000 in a city where rents and housing prices are out of reach for most families.

In the absence of any scientific evidence demonstrating that residential co-ops are even marginal

contributors to fossil-fuel pollution, the City Council has imposed crippling financial costs and penalties on co-op families.

And it has inexplicably exempted its own office buildings, New York City Housing Authority housing, and from one- to three-family homes from the punitive penalties destined to impoverish the rest of us. Local Law 97 is the greatest unfunded mandate and penalty ever imposed by the City Council on co-op residents.

LL97 requires older co-ops to undertake costly retrofitting of heating, hot water and ventilation systems to meet current building standards, regardless of need or ability to pay for such equipment. The burden of compliance sits on the shoulders of working-class families living in older housing stock; newer, multimillion-dollar buildings are already constructed to current energy codes.

We know what the costs and penalties are because many co-ops have already spent tens of thou-

sands of dollars on LL97-mandated studies of their heating plants. Glen Oaks Village, the largest garden apartment co-op in New York, conducted such a study. The devastating news in its 180-page report shows that to comply with the law, Glen Oaks Village needs to spend \$24 million on new boilers. If it doesn't spend the \$24 million now, the annually recurring penalties imposed under the law will reach \$1,096,200 in 2030. These fines would raise the monthly maintenance on each family by 5%.

Exempt affordable co-ops

To make matters worse, even if money is spent on the most efficient boilers available today, the fines will still not be eliminated. They will only be reduced to \$818,000 annually. That is because the one-size-fits-all algorithms used to determine greenhouse emissions do not work for many buildings.

A new boiler will cost each family \$9,133. A 10-year loan to finance

this project would require a monthly maintenance increase of 26% for 10 years—and that's in addition to skyrocketing property taxes and water and heating bills. Since the penalties are not fully eliminated, an additional 4% monthly maintenance increase will be necessary just to cover the remaining annual fines. Compliance with LL97 mandates to avert all penalties cannot be accomplished with any boiler equipment currently available.

The sensible solution is to exempt affordable co-op housing from LL97 and reassess the units when more data is available, after many co-ops will have retired their older boilers and made the natural transition to newer ones. If this solution is not implemented, we will see devastation to our most affordable co-op communities. ■

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