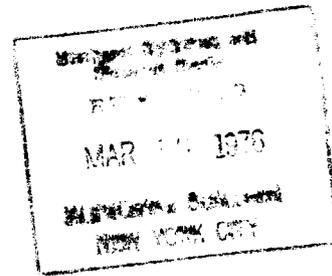


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LEFRAK CITY:
STRATEGIES FOR STABILIZATION IN AN
APARTMENT COMPLEX

by

THE NEW YORK CITY COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS

52 Duane Street
New York, N. Y.

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NEW YORK CITY COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS

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PART I:

INTRODUCTION: LEFRAK CITY AS A STABILIZATION
ISSUE

This study of Lefrak City was undertaken by the City Commission on Human Rights after problems at this large high-rise development had been reported by tenants and local residents. As a result, public attention was focused on allegations of poor maintenance and security, as well as perceptions of unusually rapid racial turnover and fears that these problems would lead to unstable conditions at Lefrak City and in the surrounding community. The Lefrak Management had begun to undertake significant managerial reforms and commit substantial resources to address the problems even before they received public attention. In October 1975 the management requested that the Commission provide its special expertise to study the situation and make recommendations for further action.

Because Lefrak City had long been a well-kept, successfully integrated housing development, the reports of changing conditions indicated a need for early in-depth study and action. The theory underlying early study is that confidence in a development or neighborhood can be restored if there is concerted intervention at the first signs of slippage in upkeep or fear of racial change.

By coincidence this study of Lefrak City began almost immediately after the Commission formally embarked on a comprehensive Neighborhood Stabilization Program, funded under the Housing and Community Development Act, to ensure the stability of neighborhoods undergoing integration or located near such neighborhoods. The Commission has found that historical attitudes about race in this country have meant that in too many cases integrated living situations rapidly become resegregated when the initial movement of minorities into a white community is followed by wholesale flight of the existing white population, who are in turn replaced only by minorities. Complicated patterns of racial and class deprivation, exploitation by profiteers, racial fears and other social problems in turn have often led to community deterioration.

Unfortunately, in the past neither government nor private individuals have sought to eliminate such patterns, no doubt largely because of the difficulty of designing effective remedies in this sensitive area. But the Commission believes that a pattern of segregation, racial transition, resegregation and deterioration is by no means necessary or inevitable, and that early intervention to prevent this pattern can be successful.

The Neighborhood Stabilization Program is developing strategies designed to prevent the flight of middle-income people of all backgrounds from New York City neighborhoods and the

accompanying erosion of the city's tax base. The program is based on the premise that the involvement of community residents in specific goal-oriented stabilization strategies and the expanded use of the Commission's enforcement power against blockbusting and racial steering can maintain and improve conditions in a neighborhood and, in fact, can reduce rapid movement out of neighborhoods, thus stabilizing them.

For the first year of the Neighborhood Stabilization Program, the Commission is working largely in communities where one-and two-family houses and smaller apartment buildings predominate. While the community in which Lefrak City is located is not one of the areas selected for the Commission program, the issues at the Lefrak City development in particular constitute classic stabilization concerns. Along with the phenomenon of racial transition of its tenancy, there were reports of physical deterioration and security problems, with a resultant flight of tenants of all backgrounds. Moreover, the public attention focused on the problems at Lefrak had the potential to destabilize the surrounding community, presently an entirely healthy and stable area. The Commission believed that Lefrak City presented an opportunity for early intervention to develop strategies for stabilization in the context of a dense, high-rise urban environment. It was in this context that the Commission undertook to study the situation and to make recommendations for further action.

Chronology of Events Leading to the Commission Study:

Articles in the press first focused public attention on Lefrak City in October 1975 and raised justifiable concern by responsible public officials and community leaders. Community Planning Board #4 began to look into the situation in late October and has continued to monitor developments at Lefrak City. The Office of Neighborhood Services became involved about the same time, coordinating City agency efforts and tenant-management meetings as well as other follow-up actions. A walking tour of Lefrak City was undertaken by Congressman Benjamin Rosenthal, representatives of the Office of Neighborhood Services, and tenants and management of Lefrak City, to evaluate problems.

Ironically, the publicity and well-meaning concern served for a time not only to focus needed attention on Lefrak City and the adjacent community, but also to heighten neighborhood tensions as well. To their credit, all of those concerned about Lefrak City — particularly the public officials, Planning Board and civic groups — were quick to see that a coordinated, professional and community effort, with the close involvement of City agencies was the most appropriate response, rather than panicked outcries which themselves can be the central force in destabilizing a neighborhood. A praiseworthy effort to pull together immediately developed. This, it should be noted, is the first essential step toward restoring full stabilization to any community or development.

In mid-October 1975, Queens Borough President Donald Manes, concerned with reducing fear and improving conditions at Lefrak City, asked Commissioner Norton to meet with representatives of the Lefrak Organization. A meeting took place on October 21, 1975 between Richard Lefrak and members of his staff and the Commissioner and some of her staff, at which the problems at Lefrak City were outlined and recent efforts by management to improve conditions were related. While the discussion indicated that there were more problems at Lefrak City than there had been in the past, based on the Commission's experience and expertise in problems of stability, the level of instability at Lefrak City did not appear to be profound or irreversible. The stabilization of the development seemed particularly amenable to remedy because it was being addressed at an early stage, and therefore, the Commission agreed to undertake an investigation and issue a report and recommendations.

The Office of Neighborhood Services (ONS), both the District Cabinet Chairperson, Commissioner Martin Gallent and the District Manager, Leonard Kahn, was also asked by the Lefrak Organization to lend its assistance to the Lefrak City situation. A meeting chaired by Commissioner Gallent was called by ONS on October 23rd bringing together tenants, management, and representatives of City agencies that had a role in the situation

at Lefrak City. At that meeting, the Office of Neighborhood Services agreed to take on the responsibility to coordinate city agency efforts to help improve conditions at the development as well as to foster meetings between tenants and management. Commission staff at the meeting outlined the intended scope of the Commission's study of Lefrak City.

At the beginning of November, Commission staff began its study of Lefrak City. Four persons were involved for the duration of the month-long investigation and were responsible for interviewing a great many persons in all aspects of the life and operation of Lefrak City. Among those interviewed were: a cross-section of about 40 tenants of Lefrak City, representing all sections of the complex and the various groups within the tenant community; management, from the President of the Lefrak Organization, to the manager and assistant managers of the buildings, superintendents, maintenance men, security personnel, and community relations personnel; community representatives including residents, storekeepers, and Planning Board members; and city officials including ONS and CPC personnel. Commission staff held extensive interviews with all parties mentioned, focusing on eliciting and corroborating facts, getting the point of view and impact of specific conditions on those interviewed, and establishing the dynamics and development of the current situation at Lefrak City, as well

as receiving suggested recommendations. The Commission received full cooperation from all concerned, and wishes to make its appreciation known for the time and carefully considered responses that were given to us by everyone whom we approached on the subject of Lefrak City.

PART II:

PROBLEMS IDENTIFIED AT LEFRAK CITY.

Background: A Brief Look at Lefrak City

The huge twenty-building complex that is called Lefrak City was built in several stages during the 1960s under the auspices of the Lefrak Organization, one of the largest apartment realtors in New York City and the nation. The Lefrak City complex is but a small portion of the Lefrak-built developments containing about 50,000 units in the New York metropolitan region. Lefrak City, which consists of about 5,000 dwelling units and about 20,000 residents, was planned as a total living environment for middle-income families, containing apartments, shopping and recreational facilities. Lefrak City was built in five sections of four buildings each — about 1,000 apartments per section — covering a 40-acre site that was the old Astor family estate.

Although the trend was toward high-rise developments in the 1950s and 1960s, Lefrak City was among the largest apartment complexes to be built in the city. Recent research has pointed out inherent problems with huge high-rise complexes, both for residents and management. These complexes have been found to inhibit the development of a strong sense of community on the part of tenants as well as to be inefficient for the delivery of

maintenance and security services. Lefrak City, like other such developments, has exhibited problems which are related, at least in part, to its size.

The boundaries of Lefrak City are 57th Avenue on the north; Junction Boulevard on the west; 99th Avenue on the east and the Long Island Expressway on the south. Lefrak City is located in the southern portion of Corona in Queens Planning District #4. Despite the need for some rehabilitation, the entire area is one whose population is solidly stable. To the east is the Corona Heights community and to the north and west of Lefrak City are the Corona and Elmhurst areas. The residents of these areas are predominantly white, moderate-income persons of Italian and Irish descent. These communities have a mix of small homes and 6 to 10 story apartment buildings. To the south, on the other side of the Long Island Expressway, is the community of Rego Park. This area was developed in the 1920s and includes several large apartment complexes such as Park City and Parker Towers, which are just across the Expressway from Lefrak City.

The area immediately surrounding Lefrak City is made up of other middle-income apartment complexes — Sherwood Village

and Rego Park Gardens, which are smaller in scale than Lefrak City — as well as small garden apartments and one-and two-family houses. The surrounding neighborhood is inhabited primarily by whites, although the area has long been home to many non-white individuals and families who are employed at the United Nations.

Changing Tenant Population

The Commission's study revealed two basic areas of concern: changes in the tenant population and problems in management and maintenance efforts. Lefrak City has undergone a rapid change in its resident population over the last several years. The turnover in population (as measured by the number of apartments rented per year) increased from 16% in 1972 to 22% in 1973 and to 25% in 1974. Along with this turnover there has been an increase in the number of minority persons living at Lefrak City. When Lefrak City was opened for occupancy in the 1960s few minority group people lived there. Over the years there was a gradual and natural rise in minority residents, until several years ago when the increase became more rapid; the present occupants have been estimated to be about 60% minority.*

*Based on conversations with tenants, management and visual observation by staff.

The dynamics of this change are not clear. To a degree, it reflects the changes that have been occurring in the City as a whole, which has been losing its white middle-income population to the suburbs over the past several decades because of deeply rooted and complicated changes in American society. Probably most prominent is the economic mobility which has opened the comfortable suburbs to increasing numbers of people, especially whites, who in former years of more modest attainment, formed a natural and larger pool for the tenancy of moderate-priced high-rise developments such as Lefrak City.

At the same time, there has been an increase in the City's minority population, and this, combined with the generally tight housing market in the City has seriously limited the availability of sound housing for minority families. Because Lefrak City has always been more accessible to minorities than housing in similar areas, and because it has a somewhat lower rental cost compared to housing in the surrounding area, Lefrak City provides upwardly mobile minority persons with an attractive housing option. Minority persons are more likely to seek housing in places where they know they will be accepted, rather than try to penetrate hostile neighborhoods. This, too, has probably contributed to the rapid population shift that Lefrak City has experienced.

Lefrak Management has identified the source of the relatively rapid racial change as a Consent Decree which it signed with the Justice Department in 1970, after the Department charged Lefrak with discriminatory rental practices in Brooklyn. The Lefrak Organization was said to have steered whites and blacks seeking apartments to different areas: whites to predominantly white buildings and neighborhoods, blacks to integrated or minority buildings. The Lefrak Organization did not admit to having engaged in racial steering, an illegal activity under the law, but agreed to sign a Consent Decree with the Justice Department requiring certain procedures to be used in future apartment rentals. Each week listings of vacant apartments in all Lefrak buildings in Brooklyn and Queens*, were posted in Lefrak's renting offices and picked up and distributed to minority families by the Open Housing Center, a civil rights organization. As a result of the Consent Decree, about 1,000 minority families obtained housing in Lefrak properties all over Brooklyn and Queens over the two-year period of the Decree.

However, it is important to note that the Lefrak City apartments that are the subject of this report were not included in the provisions of the Consent Decree, possibly because they

*Queens Buildings were subsequently added to the Decree by the Justice Department.

had a greater percentage of minorities than did Lefrak's other predominantly white buildings. Thus, the Consent Decree is not a direct cause of the influx of minorities at Lefrak City. In response, Lefrak management has suggested that it was not the Consent Decree itself, but publicity around the Decree that caused minority people to seek housing at Lefrak City. In the Commission's view, the amount of media publicity generated was minimal and could hardly account for such a major effect. More likely, Lefrak City's long-standing accessibility to minorities traveled by word of mouth. Had management made an affirmative effort to inform minority apartment-seekers who came to Lefrak City in particular of all the options available to them in Lefrak properties, the uniquely heavy concentration of minorities there and the resultant racial turnover might have been moderated.

Some tenants interviewed felt that the racial turnover at Lefrak City in and of itself was responsible for concern and fears of instability on the part of some residents. However, the majority of persons interviewed felt that racial fears and attitudes were not the basis for concern. Rather, they saw an objective difference in some of the new tenants, a difference which they identified as one of class or kind rather than race.

Problem Tenants

Both tenants and management felt that there was a small percentage of newer tenants of Lefrak City who were inconsiderate of fellow tenants, made excessive noise, did not conform to basic cleanliness standards, and possibly were responsible for the destruction of property and for incidents of crime.

Many tenants attributed this problem to the relaxation of formerly stringent tenant screening procedures. Residents who moved to Lefrak City about seven or eight years ago reported that they were subjected to a careful credit check when they applied for an apartment. This involved verification of their place of employment and the signature of a guarantor if income levels were not believed to be sufficient to meet the rent. On the other hand, newer tenants at Lefrak City claimed that their employment was not verified, nor, to their knowledge, was any other kind of credit check carried out. The easing of screening procedures was said to be related to management's desire to rent the ever-increasing number of vacant apartments. It was felt that poor screening allowed some persons with inadequate income, with larger families than they had admitted to, or with social problems to move into Lefrak City.

It is interesting that while many tenants and community residents felt that there were an overwhelming number of welfare

recipients at Lefrak City and that these tenants constituted the "problem tenants," this has been totally disproved. Data made available by the Human Resources Administration show that less than 3% of Lefrak City households receive public assistance, and of these, many became recipients only after moving to Lefrak City. Even more significant, only a tiny percentage of those identified by management as problem tenants were tenants on welfare.

Both tenants and management identified unsupervised children and teenagers at Lefrak City as those largely responsible for acts of vandalism and petty crime. It was suggested that many families living in Lefrak City had family situations where both parents worked during the day. Thus their children were often not able to enter their apartments because they did not have keys. Even when children did possess keys, some would still group with other youths on the grounds or in the lobbies of buildings. The net result was described by management as a situation which was "out of hand." Tenants generally felt the congregation of youths to be threatening. Many tenants felt that these youths were responsible for the vandalism evident in public places. Security personnel confirmed that some Lefrak City youths had been involved in such vandalism.

Various approaches to these problems were suggested. Management concurred with tenants on the need for improved tenant screening procedures. Management also felt that the situation required the eviction of problem tenants, and sought the cooperation of other tenants in providing testimony in the City's Housing Court to accomplish this. While some tenants agreed with this approach, others strongly stressed alternative measures, such as improved screening procedures, tenant education, better supervision by parents and improved recreational facilities for youth.

Management and Maintenance

Many tenants and observers held that physical deterioration and insecure conditions at Lefrak City were the result of poor management and inadequate maintenance efforts. Visits to Lefrak City by staff confirmed the existence of some maintenance problems, although efforts to remedy these were clearly successfully underway. These recent efforts were also noted by many of the tenants interviewed.

Generally, the complaints of tenants focused on poor maintenance of the public areas in the buildings — lobbies, stairways, halls. Another common complaint was the unavailability

of maintenance staff to service apartments both during working hours and in the evenings or on weekends when there is emergency coverage.

Discussions with the managers and maintenance staff* for the various sections of the Lefrak City complex revealed that they thought there / ^{were} adequate staff and materials to deal with maintenance work under ordinary conditions. However, they felt unable to keep up with the extra work generated by graffiti and other acts of vandalism on the part of some youthful residents. They believed that a responsible tenancy was at least as important to improved physical environment as maintenance efforts, and stressed the need to be able to evict particularly destructive tenants.

On the other hand, many tenants felt the problem lay in inadequate management efforts. Some felt that maintenance and management personnel were not sufficiently concerned about the level of maintenance because they believed newer tenants would tolerate lower standards.

*The Lefrak City complex has been divided for managerial and maintenance purposes into 5 sections of 4 buildings each. Each section has its own maintenance staff and its own manager. All section managers report to the general manager for the complex.

Security

As in most communities in New York City, especially high-rise residential complexes, the issues of crime and security are high priority concerns of the residents of Lefrak City, and were frequently mentioned in Commission interviews with tenants, maintenance personnel, residents in the neighboring community and owners of commercial establishments. A major feature of these discussions were reports of dissatisfaction with the organization and operation of the private security force at Lefrak City. This force of over 60 persons includes patrol officers, gatemen, doormen, and supervisory and office support staff under the direction of the Chief of Security. Patrol officers — half of whom are former New York City police officers — are responsible for patrolling the premises from roof to cellar on a 24-hour basis, and receive the majority of tenant complaints. Gatemen are assigned on a 24-hour basis to each section and are responsible for observing people entering the buildings and determining whether they have legitimate business at Lefrak City, observing T. V. monitors focused on strategic areas, and checking on whether cars are legally parked on the premises.

Tenants expressed several grievances regarding the performance or organization of the security force. It was felt that the security force who are assigned to patrol duty were not adequately

checking hallways, stairwells, garage or cellar areas. It was also said that because gatemen are not now given permanent assignments, but are frequently moved from one section to another, it is difficult for them to become familiar with those persons who do belong in their buildings and to attempt to identify those who do not.

Many residents spoke of tension between the youth at Lefrak City and the security force, and implied this was a result of hostility based on racial and cultural differences. Some residents also expressed concern that security personnel (about half of the patrol officers are armed) were unnecessarily brandishing their weapons in a potentially careless way.

PART III:
RECENT IMPROVEMENTS IN PHYSICAL CON-
DITIONS AND TENANT STABILIZATION

Efforts by Management

The Commission was gratified to note, during its study, that Lefrak Management had undertaken an intensified maintenance effort as well as organizational reforms to effect more efficient managerial functioning. Lefrak Management demonstrated both recognition of and willingness to commit resources to address the problems at Lefrak City even before these problems began to receive public attention. In July, 1975, it established a Community Relations Office in order to facilitate tenant-management communication and to provide guidance and recreational facilities for Lefrak City youth. The office is staffed by a Director, an assistant, an administrative assistant, and two persons who supervise youths using the community center. The duties of this staff were originally defined as acting as liaison between tenant and management to communicate tenant complaints, and running a community center for Lefrak youth. In response to developing problems they were also given responsibility for assisting the development of tenant security patrols, and the orientation of new tenants.

The community center is located in a small room in Section Two, and provides limited recreational facilities. Volunteers sometimes augment staff efforts by giving classes in art, chess, and dance. While five hundred youth have become members of the community center, only a dozen or so use the center at any one time. A lack of space, lack of equipment and the need for more imaginative planning and outreach techniques combine to limit participation. Additionally, very diverse and demanding assignments — tenant complaints, orientation of tenants, and organization of tenant patrols — have greatly expanded the role originally envisioned for this small staff, and tend to limit its effectiveness.

Lefrak Management has recently instituted new procedures for the screening of prospective tenants and orientation of new tenants. In addition to a thorough credit check, an investigator visits prospective tenants at their present place of residence to determine whether they pay their rent regularly and maintain their homes. New tenants are visited by a member of the Community Relations staff, who describes the functioning and use of the facilities available at Lefrak City.

On its unannounced visits Commission staff noted a great deal of activity on the part of maintenance personnel

in terms of upkeep of lobby areas, repair of front doors, painting of hallways and stairwells, and the installation of brighter lights in hallways adjacent to the elevators. These recent efforts by management to address physical problems at Lefrak City were also noted by the majority of tenants interviewed.

More recently, Lefrak Management has stated its intention to strengthen the decentralized functioning of Lefrak City with each section running as a separate unit and consequently able to give more concentrated attention to its part of the development. New section managers have been hired in 4 out of the 5 sections of the complex in an effort to improve maintenance activities as well as facilitate the relationship between tenants and management.

Lefrak Management has also recently moved to improve security conditions at Lefrak City. Enclosures connecting the four buildings of ^{each} /section were built to channel persons entering into one check point.* Video screens have also been installed in these enclosures which monitor activities through cameras placed near elevator entrances. In January, as an

*Three of the five sections have these enclosures, while work is in progress in the other two sections.

experimental measure at the urging of the Tenant's Association, management agreed to have side doors leading to the basement level of the buildings (which have been locked only from 7:00 p.m. to 7:00 a.m.) kept locked on a 24-hour basis in one section of the complex. This has already proved successful, and will be extended to all the sections in the interest of reducing potential entry points into the buildings by those who do not belong.

Another improved security measure consists of a change in police procedures to allow two N. Y. C. patrol officers to cover the grounds (but not the buildings) of the Lefrak City complex. Ordinarily, City patrolmen do not patrol private developments; however, the Police Department agreed to the change at the request of the Lefrak Management in order to better respond to incidents occurring at Lefrak City.

Tenant Involvement

In recent months, Lefrak City tenants have taken an increasing interest in the problems facing the development and a more active role in addressing them through the Tenants Association and the tenant security patrols. There has always been some form of Tenants Association at Lefrak City, although its size and the extent of its activity has fluctuated greatly over the years. The present Tenants Association — the third such

Association since Lefrak City was opened for occupancy — was organized about five years ago and at the time of our study had a membership numbering five hundred tenants. The Association is governed by an eleven-member Board of Directors, consisting of six officers elected by the general membership and five sector representatives, elected by the tenants in each sector, all serving one-year terms.

The Tenants Association has played a major role in bringing security and maintenance problems to the attention of top-level management and the public. The Association has also been active in monitoring the response of management to specific problems and has just begun to negotiate directly with representatives of the Lefrak Organization. (Earlier meetings between tenants and management were conducted under the auspices of the Office of Neighborhood Services). The leaders of the Association felt that their efforts have helped to induce recent improvements in maintenance which have occurred at Lefrak City. This improved maintenance, in response among other things to tenant pressure, helped the Tenants Association to add 250 new members during November and December.

Apart from the Tenants Association, tenants also initiated the formation of tenant patrols in November, 1975 in response to the concern for improved security. With the assistance of the

Community Relations staff, Lefrak City tenants have organized tenant patrols on a section-wide basis. These patrols, which have been organized in all but one section of the complex, have about 130 active participants, according to the Community Relations unit. The Community Relations staff provides meeting notices, keeps in touch with section leaders, and supplies armbands and walkie-talkies at no cost to tenants. Tenant security patrols are stationed in the building lobbies and most also engage in patrolling hallways. Their major function is to identify and prevent uninvited persons from gaining access to the buildings. If on their patrols they note an act of crime or vandalism, they are trained to contact by walkie-talkie the professional security staff, rather than attempt to handle the situation themselves.

Both the enhanced role of the Tenants Association and the formation of the tenant patrols are evidence of an increasing and admirable recognition on the part of tenants that they need to take a more active role in improving the conditions in which they live. While they face common problems of apathy and reluctance to become involved that have hitherto limited large-scale tenant participation, these organizations represent an encouraging first effort that can form the basis for the more concerted and extensive tenant involvement that is needed to assure the continued improvement and stability of Lefrak City.

At present, however, there is some fragmentation of tenant effort. The Tenants Association, for example, despite recent gains, still has rather low visibility, and many tenants who were concerned enough to participate in tenant patrols were not even aware of the existence of the Association. Other tenants were critical of the Tenants Association, and particularly of its very centralized leadership structure, and some of these looked to the tenant patrols as the basis for a potential alternative tenant organization. Recently, however, there are signs of growing unity and cooperation between the Tenants Association and residents who had been critical of it. This cooperation, which augurs well for the success of future tenant efforts, has come about because of the demonstrated ability of the Tenants Association to negotiate with management and effect physical improvements.

PART IV:
RECOMMENDATIONS

In the Commission's assessment, the conditions which exist at Lefrak City do not pose an insurmountable threat to the stability of the development or the surrounding community. Rather, they are concrete and definable problems that are being addressed at an early stage and are readily amenable to remedy. The exaggeration of these problems in the public imagination, and the spread of rumors and panic, could pose far more of a threat to stability than actual conditions prevailing at Lefrak City today. The Commission is therefore gratified that tenants, management, public agencies and officials, and community residents have confronted these problems in a constructive manner, working together in the effort to find positive, practical solutions.

The intensified maintenance efforts and managerial reforms, as well as increased tenant involvement, are gratifying and concrete evidence that change is well underway at Lefrak City. It is in the interest that these efforts be sustained, intensified and directed in the most effective manner to ensure stability, that the Commission makes the following recommendations.

1. Tenant involvement and organization should be greatly increased, so that tenants take an active and responsible role in influencing the conditions in which they live. This can be done through the reorganization, expansion and decentralization of the Tenants Association to involve tenants on different levels and in all areas concerning them. Professional, technical organizational assistance should be sought to effect this tenant organization.

Lefrak City tenants have already begun to take a more active role in the development and are at least partly responsible for the changes that have taken place. In the Commission's view, this tenant effort needs to be greatly expanded and intensified. Citizen involvement is central to any stabilization effort, in any kind of community. The Commission's Neighborhood Stabilization Program, discussed above, is founded on the principle that neighborhood residents must take responsibility for their community, and that self-help, not wholesale deferral to others, is the key to neighborhood improvement. In designated Neighborhood Stabilization neighborhoods, the Commission will be working with residents to help them organize themselves through block, tenant and merchant organizations to effect needed change and build the neighborhood cohesiveness that is vital if the city is to resist the forces and

conditions that lead to flight. While the Neighborhood Stabilization Program is currently working largely with homeowners and tenants of low-rise buildings, the Commission is convinced that the principles involved are equally applicable and equally crucial to large buildings and developments and to Lefrak City in particular.

Tenant organization programs in other apartment house situations have often proved enormously successful in improving living conditions and building community feeling. In New York City, there are many instances of middle-income tenants, such as those in Lefrak City, who have effectively formed tenant associations and councils directed to protecting their rights and improving their living conditions. These associations exist in various neighborhoods throughout the city such as: the West Side Tenants Union in Manhattan; the Tenant Association at Co-op City, the huge cooperative complex in the northeast Bronx; the groups of associations which have formed Tenant Councils in Flatbush and Borough Park in Brooklyn; and the Association in Windsor Park, the large private development in Bayside, Queens.

Many smaller buildings also have tenant associations. In the Commission's Stabilization area in Brooklyn, the Prospect-Lefferts Gardens Neighborhood Association has an active tenants component. With the assistance of a community organizer, tenant associations have been formed in about 60 buildings and have successfully negotiated with their landlords for housing improvements.

After complaints are presented, many owners have agreed to make needed repairs and institute better security measures according to a mutually satisfactory timetable. Regular meetings between tenants and owners have been instituted as part of the process of monitoring management responsiveness as well as to air mutual problems.

In St. Louis, Missouri, an experimental program in tenant participation in management has had dramatic results. With the assistance of and funding by the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development and the Ford Foundation, the residents of two public housing developments assumed responsibility for the management of their buildings. Beneficial changes in the developments where tenants were involved included increases in the collection of rents and in rental income; decreases in the number of vacant apartments; reductions in vandalism; cleaner buildings and more efficiently delivered services.

While the examples cited may not present identical situations to Lefrak City, the Commission is convinced that they indicate the direction for future efforts necessary to assure the stability of the Lefrak City development. The Lefrak City Tenants Association represents a promising basis to build upon, but it will require some changes in structure and organization. The centralized structure of its Board of Directors, which has only one representative for each section of about 1000 apartments, tends to overburden the

members with responsibility as well as inhibit grassroots membership and the delegation of responsibility and activity that could involve large numbers of tenants. To provide the necessary breadth of tenant involvement, the Tenants Association should be extensively restructured to function on a grassroots level. Floor associations analogous to block associations in communities of private homes could form the basic unit of organization, with tenants on each floor organizing to assure the floor is properly serviced and that the tenants, through peer involvement and standard-setting, take responsibility for their own apartments and immediate surroundings. Floor representatives could then organize on a building basis, and building representatives form a "sector council" that deals directly with the sector management.

Such an extensive organization effort may well require professional assistance in the form of community organizers skilled in developing such groups. Possible sources for such assistance include the current Lefrak Community Relations Staff; staff financed by the collective contributions of tenants or contributions from others, such as religious institutions or foundations; or new staff hired by Lefrak for this purpose. While the Commission's Neighborhood Stabilization Program does not include the Lefrak City area, and staff is not available for this purpose, the Commission is ready to offer short-term technical assistance,

advice and training in Neighborhood Stabilization methods to whatever staff may be designated for this purpose.

2. Recent improvements in managerial functions, including an improved level of maintenance, new tenant screening and orientation procedures, and a move toward decentralization of management, should be sustained.

Lefrak Management has demonstrated a serious commitment to improving management functioning by the increased efforts and reforms recently undertaken. This admirable demonstration by management of a commitment to the health of the development is vital to its stability and might well be emulated by other developers and landlords in the city who find early signs of problems in their buildings. Particularly when a fall-off in maintenance efforts occurs simultaneously with a racial turnover of the tenancy, the conclusion is too readily drawn that racial change automatically incurs deteriorating conditions, that instability is inevitable, and that flight from the community is the only possible response. Lefrak Management therefore has a special responsibility to maintain a high and visible level of maintenance and managerial response, even in the face of the increased financial burden incurred by escalating material, fuel and labor costs.

Less responsible tenants may well have added to the challenge of providing adequate services and maintenance efforts. Conversely, however, concerned tenants need to be assured that their own efforts and contributions will be reciprocated with an effective management response. Management should continue to meet with tenants on a regular basis, as has been done recently, in order to assure communication and establish an effective relationship.

3. The Community Relations Unit at Lefrak City should be upgraded, its tasks more narrowly defined and additional recreational space provided in order to provide more effective service.

Management has shown foresight and commitment to the provision of services for tenants by the establishment of the Community Relations unit. This unit, however, is hampered because its energies are directed to many diverse areas. Provision of additional space and professional staff who are assigned only to recreation duties would enhance the level of recreational opportunities available at Lefrak City as well as help to alleviate the problems posed by idle, unsupervised youth. Specifically, recreation space and programs should be provided for each section of the complex in order to offer better and more accessible activities to all residents of Lefrak City. Such

recreational opportunities can improve the quality of life and enhance a sense of community in the Lefrak City development for adults, especially senior citizens, as well as for youth.

Other specialized staff should be responsible for tenant-management related activities such as orientation of new tenants and handling of tenant complaints. If the decision is made to provide organizational assistance to the Tenants Association through Lefrak's Community Relations unit, additional staff would be needed to accomplish this.

4. Security efforts at Lefrak City should be further developed to include better deployment of staff, sensitivity training for patrol officers and a forum for an ongoing dialogue with tenants.

Management has responded to tenant demands for better security through such measures as locking side doors on a 24-hour basis, installing video cameras, etc. In order to further improve security at Lefrak City, additional staff should be assigned to assist the gatemen who now are insufficient in number to perform the diverse duties of checking cars, video screens and people entering the development. In addition, regular meetings between the security force and the Tenants Association should be instituted on a section

basis to serve as a two-way system of communication. In order to reduce tensions between the youth at Lefrak City and security personnel, sensitivity training sessions should be included in the formal training procedures of the security force. These new efforts, coupled with the maintenance of measures already undertaken,* would contribute measurably to improving security at Lefrak City.

* On an experimental basis, beginning in January 1976, a security guard has joined each of the gatemen on duty during the 4 p.m. to 12 midnight shift.

PART V:

COMMISSION FOLLOW-UP

When the Commission investigates jurisdictional cases it monitors the remedy at specific time intervals for effectiveness and compliance. While this study is unrelated to any complaint of discrimination, the Commission proposes to undertake a similar monitoring of conditions at Lefrak City by revisiting the development in six months to evaluate measures taken and to ascertain if further changes are necessary.

Given staff and budget limitations this follow-up effort cannot be an extensive investigation but it should be possible to evaluate progress in a brief report using this more extensive study as a basis.

It is hoped that the Commission's continuing interest and involvement will stimulate and encourage action on the part of management, tenants, and all others concerned.

PART VI:

CONCLUSION

After studying conditions at Lefrak City, the Commission believes that stabilization of the development can be achieved through a sustained, concerted effort on the part of management and tenants alike. What is particularly promising is that both management and tenants have already demonstrated their recognition of the problems facing them and a commendable willingness and commitment to work to eliminate these problems. Lefrak City management, by acknowledging the deteriorating conditions in the development, by taking initial steps to improve maintenance and services, and by seeking the help of the Commission and other city agencies, has made a commitment to restoring the health of its apartment complex that can serve as an example to other landlords, realtors, and developers in this city. Too many who own or manage buildings in New York see racial change in their tenants or initial signs of deterioration as an omen of inevitable instability and a signal to disinvest in their properties, thereby assuring the very instability they fear.

Lefrak City management has an opportunity to show that signs of deterioration are in fact entirely reversible, and that a healthy, stable living situation is possible in an integrated

development. To do this, management must continue to demonstrate its commitment to providing a high level of maintenance, security and other services and its responsiveness to tenant concerns. It must not be tempted to relax its efforts once the spotlight is no longer continuously on management. Only a concerted and unremitting effort can work the complete reversal of deteriorating conditions that is necessary to restore full confidence in the development by existing and prospective tenants and neighborhood residents and leaders. This goal, so clearly on the horizon, cannot be achieved overnight but it will not be achieved at all if signs of slippage in upkeep begin to reappear. Finally, the Lefrak Organization has a special obligation in the case of Lefrak City to dispel unfounded rumor and stereotypes that racial change will incur deteriorating conditions.

But while its role is crucial, management cannot by its efforts alone assure stability. Tenants must recognize their own responsibility for affecting their environment and the quality of community life, and must take a stepped-up active role in improving and maintaining conditions. The impact of tenant participation has been repeatedly demonstrated in this city and throughout the nation. Lefrak City tenants have shown that they are willing to take an active role in affecting their living conditions, but to maximize this role will require both the increased

tenant participation that has begun and a major restructuring of tenant organizations. This is a time in New York when citizen effort in all areas is vital to preserving the viability of the city. Lefrak City tenants can and must act to play a direct role in determining how they live. If Lefrak management makes a reciprocal commitment, the Commission is confident that the stability of Lefrak City will be assured.

Action by both management and tenants cannot be deferred. The initial efforts already made must be sustained and strengthened in the next few months. Lefrak City can serve as an example and a prototype for apartment dwellers all over New York City; because of its size and prominence, its fate has enormous implications for the stability not only of its community, but for the entire city. It calls for an extraordinary dedication of resources and efforts, a commitment that the Commission is determined shall be made and a commitment that we share.

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