

# COLUMBIA SPECTATOR

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## News

# 110th St. Residents Disgruntled

## *Landlord Ohebshalom, Owner of Local Buildings, Subject to Investigation*

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As time passes, the enemies of Fred Ohebshalom and his real estate companies continue to grow in number and outrage.

Tenants living in more than 30 apartment buildings owned under the names of Sky Management, Empire Management, or Acquisition America, all owned by the Ohebshalom family, say they have endured harassment and denials of tenants' rights under the family's ownership.

Now, tenants groups, the Local Service Employees International 32BJ Union, and various politicians are trying to hold the companies accountable for possible unscrupulous landlord practices.

In Feb. 2003, Ohebshalom bought 12 apartment buildings in Manhattan, the Bronx, and Westchester. Three of them, 509 and 515 West 110th Street, and 517 West 113th Street, are in the Morningside Heights area.

According to people familiar with the situation, tenants lost security, cleaning, and repair services almost immediately. Grievances against their landlord include the employment of ineffective non-union workers replacing long-time union workers, unjustified harassment and eviction notices, and unsanctioned apartment construction in order to increase occupancy.

Public officials, most notably Assemblyman Danny O'Donnell, City Public Advocate Betsy Gotbaum, and City Councilmen Bill Perkins and Phillip Reed, have publicly voiced concerns over Ohebshalom's tenants' plights since early 2003.

According to Danny Vega, a spokesperson for Assemblyman O'Donnell, "Not much has happened. We remain at a stalemate with the Ohebshalom situation."

Currently, the New York Office of the Attorney General is in the early stages of investigating Ohebshalom's practices.

On March 4, a preliminary hearing was held between Ohebshalom's companies and the Local 32BJ. Vega said that not much resulted from the meeting, except for giving both tenants and the union a chance to voice concerns against Ohebshalom. Another meeting is planned, but the date has not yet been determined.

Jim Harwood, president of the tenants association of 509 West 110th Street, says that despite the mounting concern and pressure forming against Ohebshalom, the landlord continues "beating the hell out of the tenants."

He said that while elderly tenants have received the bulk of harassment, coming in the form of threats and eviction notices, "no one is left unscathed." Harwood cited instances in which Ohebshalom's companies tried to manipulate rent renewal contracts and even threatened Harwood with eviction.

He claims that Ohebshalom is illegally converting emptied rent-controlled and rent-stabilized one- and two-bedroom apartments into two- and three-bedroom apartments, respectively.

Inspectors from New York City's Department of Buildings have not yet found the companies' practices contrary to law.

According to the DOB's Business Information System, there have been multiple complaints concerning possible unlicensed construction to apartments at all three Morningside buildings within the past year. The complaints were dismissed based on physical observation.

Shalom Slumlords, NYC, a grassroots opposition group against the companies associated with Ohebshalom, has documented the companies' attempts to increase revenue through unpermitted space conversions. These include the conversion of five one-bedroom apartments at 231 East 14th Street to four-bedroom apartments and the evacuation of 18 of 20 apartments at 8 Saint Mark's Place to create unzoned commercial space.

Harwood said that the tenants would not back down. He said, "We are starting to have court cases, fighting for both rent laws and old people."

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