

Tenants Forced Out of Affordable Complex Will Get Aid

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Tenants of an affordable apartment complex in Gaithersburg will receive rental assistance, adequate time to relocate and moving help for the elderly and disabled before their buildings are demolished this year to make way for upscale development.

The City of Gaithersburg and Fairfield Realty, developer of the project, announced yesterday that they had agreed on a deal that met most of the demands of residents of Broadstone Apartments, who are being forced to vacate about 300 units.

Letters in English and Spanish notifying them of the plan will go out today.

"Overall, tenants have been able to win items that are vital for their lives," said Alisa Glassman, a member of Action in Montgomery, a faith-based organization working with the tenants. "They got almost everything they asked for and in the process helped educate the city about what does it really mean for a family to be forced out of their home."

The plan, put together by city staff and approved by the developer, guarantees the residents 3 1/2 months of rent, refunded security deposits and priority at Fairfield's other properties and at about 60 affordable units that will be set aside at the new 334-unit complex. Volunteers will be available to help with moving.

The developer and city have also agreed to help the tenants, who must move out by Nov. 15, find affordable homes. They will keep up-to-date lists of available units in the area, as well as relevant information about rent and school systems.

"Rather than us thinking we know what the tenants need, we've had a lot of conversation with the tenants," Assistant City Manager Fred Felton said. "I think we have a better sense of the needs and concerns of the residents."

The developer refused to meet one demand: additional help with moving costs such as rental trucks. Although the city has agreed to advance residents some of their rent, the refusal to provide additional funds is disappointing for tenants who could use every penny, said Thomas Cowley, a member of Action in Montgomery.

"There's a level of disappointment here," Cowley said. "I think that we all felt that there should be some acknowledgments that it's a burden for many of them and that it's a burden that ought to be shared."