

Protesters March Despite Storm County Could Get Tax Before Town Of Newburgh

By Meghan Fitzpatrick

On Monday evening low-income Newburgh residents from Community Voices Heard marched down Broadway chanting, raising signs and demanding that the City Council include low-income housing in the Master Plan

the City is drawing up. Monday night's storm didn't halt the group wearing bright blue t-shirts from descending on City Hall.

In front of City Hall, men, women and children chanted, "Brick by Brick, Wall by Wall, Build a City for us All!" The

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Martina Pickett (center) chants through a megaphone at Monday night's protest at City Hall.



Community Voices Heard arrived at City Hall, after marching down Broadway, to protest low-income housing conditions in the City.

By Kristen Hamel-McEvoy

At the Town of Newburgh Town Board meeting on Tues., Jun. 17 the issue of instituting a hotel-motel tax was once again on the agenda. According to Councilman George Woolsey Orange County has not been supportive of the

Town's efforts to institute the tax, but the County is now working towards instituting a countywide hotel-motel tax.

"We have endorsed and pursued this tax every year since 2001," Town Supervisor Wayne Booth explained. "We have received no support from the County."

In March, the Orange County Commission on Efficiency and Cost Containment was created to evaluate how the County could generate revenue. One of the short-term recommendations was to institute a hotel-motel tax. Steve Gross, chairman of the commission, called it a "hotel-motel surcharge or user fee." It is estimated that this tax will generate \$3

million in revenue for the County.

"The County is being very cautious because of the current economic climate," Chairman Gross explained. "We are taking precautions."

Gross was not aware of the hotel-motel tax the Town of Newburgh has been working to institute.

Orange County is the only county in the immediate area to not have the tax in place. Dutchess, Ulster, Sullivan and Rockland Counties all have a hotel-motel tax.

"I am the last person in the world to want to put an additional burden of a tax on the residents of the Town of Newburgh," Woolsey explained. "This tax would be paid by tourists, not residents." Woolsey added, "When ever any of us travel we have to pay this additional tax on hotel-motel rooms, so we should be able to get that back from tourists who come here to stay."

"Just with the flow of people coming in for the Annual West Point Graduation would create a profit," Councilwoman Betty Greene agreed. "The hotels and motels in the Town of Newburgh are always packed this time of year"

When a resident in the audience asked how they could help to get this tax implemented in the Town Woolsey replied, "You can help by writing letters to the editor, Larkin, Kirvan etc., this is something that is only going to help the Town of Newburgh". Councilman George Woolsey first introduced the idea of the tax back in 2001. Woolsey said, "Senator Larkin has been able to pass this in the Senate however it always fails when it reaches the Assembly."

County Executive Edward Diana is currently reviewing the Commission's recommendation to create a county hotel-motel tax. The State would then have to approve the tax.

NO MASTER PLAN WITH OUT US

Low Income Residents March To City Hall

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group of approximately 50 protesters entered Council Chambers where Brenda McPhail stepped up to the microphone to demand that the needs of low-income residents are included in the Plan.

In front of City Hall, lifelong Newburgh resident Ianthe DeHaney said, "We are here because we believe that everyone deserves a decent place to live that they can afford. Unfortunately this is not the reality here in Newburgh, and it's getting worse every day."

The five-year resident of Mullins apartments, public housing run by the Newburgh Housing Authority spoke about the evictions and unaffordable rent.

Fifty-year resident Maretta Melvin shouted in a megaphone, "They say, 'Man have not because they ask not.' So tonight we are asking, 'Are we going to be included in the plans for the future of Newburgh?'"

McPhail, a leader of Community Voices Heard, an organization led and directed by low-income members, declared the low-income residents' concerns in front of City Council and a packed audience, even though their issue was not on the agenda. Mayor Valentine tried to stop McPhail and even banged the gavel to bring the attention back to the scheduled agenda.

Upon finishing her speech, McPhail and the other members of Community Voices Heard chanted, "Who's City? Our City?" and "Fight, Fight, Fight, Fight, Housing is a Human Right!"

while leaving the Chambers and marching up Broadway.

The Master Plan will guide development in Newburgh through 2040. A vote on it was postponed prior to the protest.