

News

Officials walk in others' shoes in Newburgh

By Adam Bosch

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CITY OF NEWBURGH — It's about 2 p.m. when the crowd of 50 people walks up to the blighted apartment house at 155 Chambers St.

They've come to show lawmakers what it's like to live poor in Newburgh. The tour soon becomes more real than organizers had planned.

Landlord John Boubaris is standing on the crooked porch and won't let anyone inside, despite a tenant giving permission. Boubaris is furious. He's yelling at Rep. Maurice Hinchey, he's blocking the door and he's blaming all the building's problems on his tenants.

"This place has no violations!" Boubaris yells. "It's the people who live here that don't clean up after themselves."

Boubaris relents and allows Hinchey, D-Hurley, and a handful of others inside. The locks on the front door are broken, the railings are falling off, the inside looks like a tornado hit.

"It's disgraceful," Hinchey says after coming out.

The often-contentious relationship between Newburgh tenants and landlords was among the many plights that Community Voices Heard, an activist group, highlighted Saturday during its "Day in Our Shoes" tour. The group led city, county, state and federal lawmakers on a walking tour of Newburgh's boarded-up neighborhoods and took them to a musty hotel in New Windsor where the homeless are sheltered on the county's dime.

The goal was to convince lawmakers to focus stimulus money and legislative action on low-income housing stock, much of which is owned by the city, and to create jobs for the poor.

"We don't want a handout," said Loretta Manning, one of the group leaders. "We just want people to help us help ourselves."

With increased focus on domestic issues, Hinchey believes additional money will go to projects that would help the poor in Newburgh. But he also said it's frustrating to secure money for cities like Newburgh and then watch the funding "just sit around" and not get used properly.

Newburgh has recently drawn sharp criticism from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development for misusing grant money that was intended for projects to help the poor.

Activists said the money could have helped people like Louann Petrillo and Glenn Easterday. The couple was evicted from a motel in Middletown earlier this year, and Orange County now pays \$2,800 to keep them at a New Windsor hotel. Easterday had to sell his car and is worried he'll lose his landscaping job for lack of transportation. Lately he's been picking cans out of trash containers for money to help feed their 4-year-old daughter.

"I want to work, I really want to," Easterday said, "but I don't see any hope."

abosch@th-record.com