

# The New Tenants' Voice

IPNTA: 310 Greenwich Street, 39-P, New York, NY 10013. <http://ipnta.org>. e-mail: [info@ipnta.org](mailto:info@ipnta.org) November 2005

## Where We Are Now: J51 and Other Issues

By Diane Lapson

Here's a summary of developments concerning our landlord's participation in a tax-abatement plan known as J-51, IPNTA's response, and its implications for tenants at IPN. For new tenants who have not been informed of these issues, J-51 requires that certain benefits be given to tenants, such as keeping rents in accord with state regulations, as opposed to market demands.

The IPNTA has taken time – maybe more than some of us anticipated – to thoroughly research the law and rights afforded under J-51 abatements. Though we can never be 100 percent certain of any situation's outcome, we must not move forward on issues that affect all the tenants without doing our homework and first knowing the worst case and best case scenarios.

### Some History

Before our last meeting in August, all of you received a threatening note from Stellar Management's attorney, trying to intimidate tenants by insinuating that if we even *investigated* a J-51, our underlying deal—reached last year after four years of organizing—would be threatened. We informed tenants that the threat was an empty threat. Our negotiated deal is binding.

We further explained to you that the J-51 tax abatement for IPN was discovered through conversations with West Village Houses Tenant Association President, Katie Bordanaro.

The WVHTA's attorney, Carole Ule, discovered the J-51 by accident while the tenants were preparing to purchase their building in 2005. It was quite a surprise to her and all involved. That's how buried the J-51 is if the landlord does not register with the government after receiving it.

It was the West Village tenants who could not afford to buy (not represented by Carole Ule but by Collins, Dobkins & Miller) who realized the J-51 could help them.

When we researched and discovered that, in fact, IPN also had had a J-51 tax abatement since 1998, it was this law firm we ultimately contacted because it represents tenants who are dealing with the J-51 situation. (We considered retaining Ule, but there was a potential conflict of interest.)

We did further research to determine what J-51 would mean for all IPN tenants in various situations (voucher, LAP & free market tenants). The IPNTA Executive Board was motivated primarily by a desire to protect our voucher tenants against the threat of reduced federal funding.

We, of course, appreciate the initial discovery of J-51 from our friends at West Village Houses and wish them all well in settling their particular conflicts so that all tenants are protected in their future plans.

At that August meeting informing tenants of their J-51 rights, we mentioned a plan to distribute surveys to collect information from our three types of tenants, but were told by our attorney that we did not need that information at this time. We asked people to put their questions in the lobby boxes and responded to some personally and by printing several fliers and n

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### **Independence Plaza North Tenants Association Board of Directors**

Diane Lapson	President	Vicki Green	Vice President, 40 Harrison St.
Edmund Rosner	Vice President, 80 N. Moore	Jean Hartman	Treasurer
Kathleen McGovern	Vice President, 310 Greenwich St.	Judy Bernstein	Secretary
Manuel Cabrero	Vice President, Town Houses	Felix Ortiz	Vice President at Large
		John Lynch	Vice President at Large

## Where We Are Now: J51 and Other Issues

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attorney advised us to postpone our promise to discuss our strategy with tenants at a subsequent meeting, citing the need for confidentiality.

I'm sure you can understand why it's important to protect our strategy. Discussing next steps in a meeting is like calling Stellar Management and telling them what our plans are. We have considered the concerns of the tenants who took the time to contact us and based our strategy on what is good for everyone.

### Next Steps

In fact, next steps, which we are negotiating with our attorney, are simpler than most tenants think. After those next steps are taken, we will inform all tenants of their participation possi-

bilities in a J-51 suit and encourage a discussion of how each of you wants to proceed (or not) with the IPNTA's suggestions.

We will rely strongly on what our attorney believes would be the most prudent course to take. Again, no steps will be taken without keeping the security of the tenants at IPN into consideration.

We will call a general tenants meeting in about a month to explain what the first steps are. We will also keep you informed with newsletters and memos. We are obviously trying to conserve money, but we hear you want more communication. Anyone who can donate printing, please contact us. (We print about 1500 copies each time, so if you can offer free printing even for a partial number of copies, thanks. *(Continued on page 4)*)

## Voucher Issues: An Update

By Vicki Green

**T**he latest info for those of us receiving vouchers is that there is no news as far as federal funding for vouchers being withdrawn. So at this time, no news is good news!

**Interim Rent Statements:** Some of us received notices informing us of our interim rent statements but were bewildered as to what this means. On the face of it, this document confirms the tenant's compliance with regulations and, therefore, is a reassuring statement of the tenant's continued eligibility and receipt of rent assistance.

But tenants have also told us that they received the interim notice and, after that, a request for more documents. What to do?

**Documentation:** Our advice is to give HPD (the NYC Dept of Housing and Urban Preservation) whatever it requires—even if you are giving them the same documents you provided months ago. HPD is a big organization whose staff can lose things and need to see them again. Deplorable, maybe, but our best move is to comply rather than complain.

**Inspection:** Next is the matter of inspections. Some of us have been inspected, some not. It is a matter of law that we allow access to our apart-

ments when HPD schedules an inspection. If we deny access, our vouchers may be withheld. It's crazy to risk our homes over this. And there's a plus side to allowing access. Many apartments fail inspections if the kitchen appliances don't work, so if you have a problem with non-working *appliances this is your chance to speak up*. The landlord has to remedy these faults!

If you are concerned with these or any other matters regarding your voucher, we are very glad to help you understand your rights and obligations. Drop a note in your lobby box in an envelope addressed to Vicki or Voucher Lady. Or e-mail us at [Vicki40Harrison@aol.com](mailto:Vicki40Harrison@aol.com). Tell us the best way to reach you, and we will contact you.

### Important Contacts at IPN

MANAGEMENT (212) 962-3530

MAINTENANCE (212) 233-1163

SECURITY & AFTER HOURS EMERGEN-  
CIES: (212) 376-4161

IPNTA: [Info@IPNTA.ORG](mailto:Info@IPNTA.ORG) or leave a note in tenant box.

In an emergency, our CERT team has advised us to always call 911 first. Then you may call the security at IPN. This can be critical in a life threatening situation.

# SPOTLIGHT ON TOWNHOUSES

By Manuel Cabrero

**T**ownhouse living is a mixed experience of independence and isolation. Detached from the IPN community, the sixty-nine townhouse units, which range in size from studios to 4 bedrooms, are dispersed over the two plazas, the walkway facing BMCC, the area behind the federal row houses on Harrison St., and along the two blocks of Greenwich Street from Duane to N. Moore.

This large area makes it difficult for residents to meet and greet one another as tower residents do in their lobbies and elevators. As someone who has lived both in a tower and in a townhouse, I have a perspective on the advantages and disadvantages of both and want to share my perspective with those of you who don't know townhouse life.

Our unique living arrangement means that townhouse tenants face different security issues from those faced by tenants in the towers. Unlike the towers, townhouse units don't have one entry point with a security guard to watch who comes and goes or to announce visitors. Therefore issues of lighting, cameras, and roving guards are primary concerns to us.

The plazas, although private property, are used by the public, sometimes for illicit activities like walking dogs, drug transactions, game playing and loitering. The south plaza also houses PS 150, and doubles as the schoolyard.

Because our front doors and terraces are accessible to all, we need a vigilant security force, camera monitoring, and common area lighting. Currently, all three are inadequate for the proper safety of residents.

We have been lucky thus far that more incidents have not occurred. We have applauded the increased staffing of common areas on special days, like Halloween and July 4, but most of the time the understaffed security force is not visible enough to meet the special needs of the townhouses.

Maintenance issues also differ for townhouses. Currently, we are in the middle of the reconstruction of the north plaza, a disruption that, at times, has limited residents' easy access to their units, right to clean surroundings, and peace and quiet during parts of the day and weekends. At this time, management has said that construction is likely to continue through the summer of 2006. Other maintenance issues have to do with planters, irrigation systems, garbage pick-

tower laundry rooms, wheel chair access, low water pressure, and intruding squirrels and rodents--issues that most tower residents don't face.

Additionally, the doors that access the towers from the plazas have locks that are in ill repair or are often left ajar—a problem that compromises the safety of all.

Some tower residents may perceive townhouse residents as not being part of the IPN community, and even among ourselves, it is difficult to communicate because we are so dispersed. Our two "Townhouse Captains" can't meet their neighbors in the lobby and elevators, so we rely on e-mail and flyers in our mail slots for staying in touch.

Despite our separateness, we *are* part of the IPN community, and, although the minority portion of the total population of IPN, the "townhousers" are proportionately high in IPN membership, are good neighbors and look out for one another. Many have been in their units for many years and have raised children and grandchildren here. We take pride in living in our homes and pride in our community. (*Building Service Committee reports increased uniformed presence at these doors between 4 PM and 8 AM., and has been told by management many lighting deficiencies had been resolved.*)

## CERT TRAINING

**T**he New York City Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) program trains neighborhood and community-based volunteer teams to:

- ? inform, educate, and train their neighbors about disaster preparedness
- ? assist public safety agencies and local community boards with public events
- ? respond to local disasters in accordance with CERT protocols and support emergency personnel upon their arrival
- ? assist agencies in managing spontaneous volunteers at a disaster site

Tribeca/Soho currently has one certified CERT team. Many of its members are IPN tenants. We have been meeting once a month. (If you are on the CERT team and aren't getting notices it means your email/ phone is either changed or not working. Please let us know by dropping current info in the tenant box:

Though the meetings are for people who are already certified, we have extended the invitation to those who would like to receive the free training.

# Where We Are Now...About those notes

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**R**egarding the distribution of notes from tenants outside of the IPNTA, we again remind you that unless the information is from the IPNTA, you are not getting fully researched and accurate information.

Such notes are often riddled with inaccuracies and serve only to confuse people and make them nervous. After taking the time and great effort over these five years to organize the tenants of IPN to save our homes, we are a bit protective. We trust that you can tell the difference between those who try to inform with research based facts and those who try to break unity – our biggest strength.

## Not to Worry

We are proud of the good work that has been done in the past 5 years by the IPNTA board, floor captains and active members. We are also proud of the IPN tenants who have stepped up to the plate and supported all of our struggles. You have all helped write a big chapter in the history of affordable housing in New York City AND community response in an emergency (9/11/01.)

We are also proud of the respect and reputation we have outside of IPN. For members who may have forgotten what we've accomplished, or who weren't living here and wish to learn the history of our transition from Mitchell-Lama to private ownership — including our attempts to purchase the buildings from our original landlord—please drop us a note in the tenant box with your name and address and we'll get you a summary.

Our past commitment speaks for our future efforts. Having found out about a tax abatement that should have made IPN stabilized, we are committed to effect the best possible outcome for all our tenants. Many of the IPNTA Executive Board members and active tenants—most of who have full time jobs—are working 10 to 30 hours a week in your behalf.

## Have Concerns? Offer Your Services

For better communications, here's what we suggest. Those of you who are simply talking to each other, questioning what is happening, etc. please come forward and volunteer. We need more captains- more members of committees – in other words: *active people.*

Even if you already have a captain on your floor, step forward. The more people who are willing to do the work, the better. Then, work closely with your building Vice President. Encourage the board to set up more captains' meetings by suggesting dates, speaking to other captains – and helping to get people there. Captains can help pass info around and field tenants' questions. Committee members help us get the work done. We hold elections every year.

## The Near Future

Finally, we look forward to many changes at IPN this coming 2006. Anyone who joins right now will have his or her membership count for 2006. If you have never been a member, it's time to become one. Ensuring the affordability of your home is too important to either sit on the fence or pretend nothing is happening.

Join and get involved. Write to [info@IPNTA.org](mailto:info@IPNTA.org) or leave a note in the tenants' box in the lobby, but don't make it anonymous or it just gets tossed. Volunteer your services. Help us raise money for legal service+es. By all means, come look at our books if you are a member. Membership is \$20 per adult, \$10for seniors.

Note that the board is also busy every day on the following matters: our other 20 plaintiff case in court, helping people with voucher issues with HPD & security and maintenance matters, working on the J-51 strategy, serving on other boards for the sake of our larger community as it relates to IPN. We are, as always, committed to protecting IPN tenants by making their homes as secure as possible.

# Report on Building Services: Rats, Pigeons, Elevators...and much more

By Virginia Clammer

**I**PNTA's Building Services Committee (BSC) monitors the delivery of services by management to tenants. The disruptions of the last few years, including elevator and window replacement, balcony and plaza renovation, and the renovation of vacant apartments, along with reduced maintenance staff, make our job feel like swimming upstream, but if swimming upstream makes changes, that's just what we'll do.

Our tenants have experienced inconvenience to the breaking point. Management needs to hire enough staff to supervise and execute renovations while, at the same time, provide daily maintenance of services so that tenant quality of life is not reduced.

Currently, one Stellar management person is in charge of both jobs, and though he is working hard and tries to accommodate our requests, he is doing double duty. We have requested additional supervisory staff and may need to take stronger action to get it. Remember two years ago and our revolving doormen? It was a member of the BSC who organized the tenant petitions that led to a return to our regular doormen. (Soon after, Mike Grasso, head of security who came up with the revolving doormen concept was let go.) People power.

At present, and until the underlying problem of insufficient staff is remedied, a member of our committee is in almost daily contact with management to address problems as they arise. In addition, the committee meets on a monthly basis with Debbie Dolan, Tobias Sahl, Vinnie Hernandez, and Bill Wallace to make sure that ongoing problems are dealt with in a timely fashion.

A few of the recent problems have been: **Rodents:** If a tenant complains about rodents, and management doubts the tenant, we don't take no for an answer. We were hands on with a couple of apartments that needed holes repaired. We are currently working to

address a serious rodent problem at the pizza store near N. Moore.

**Pigeon poop:** We have heard the tenants' many complaints and have worked with management to arrange for pigeon deterrents to be placed on the roofs of the townhouses.

**Townhouse lighting:** Many of the townhouses have received new exterior lights. Other related problems are being addressed.

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## CERT TRAINING

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to commit and those who would just like to check out the situation are invited to our next CERT meeting. Please join us.

We have been taught a large repertoire of preparatory and reactive measures. It's amazing how just a few simple procedures can make the difference regarding survival, safety and in some cases, even the saving of lives. We don't need to watch more news reports to understand that the real first responders are usually the members of the community, or your own family members. Though CERT does not train us to be official first responders, we know there will be times where no one will come to assist. (Think 9/11 in lower Manhattan and Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans, not to mention blackouts, etc.)

We especially need some doctors, nurses, medical assistants, social workers with trauma training to join our CERT team. We need to get more people so Tribeca can have its own team. Battery Park not only has a large CERT team, with committees that have various disaster duties and experience, they even have people who handle boats, and some of their leaders have military experience. Certainly IPN has more people with skills such as electricians, military personnel, plumbers, etc. *Actually, whatever you got, we need!* Go to the NYC website to get inspired: <http://www.nyc.gov/html/oem/html/programs/cert.html> and then, come to the next CERT meeting at IPN: November 28th, 7:00 PM, 310 Greenwich Street, Community Room (2nd floor).

## Report on Building Services: Rats, Pigeons, More...

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**Plaza repair:** Who can say which of the renovations is the most intrusive, but our townhouse neighbors on the North Plaza have been enduring a lot of noise and dust. (The townhouses are ably represented by their VP, Manuel Cabrero, whose report is also in this newsletter.) The BSC regularly tours the plazas to ensure compliance with procedures entailing covering and hosing down dust as well as access during renovations.

**Differential heating for different faces of towers:** Winter is coming, and we are asking management to supply uniform heating throughout the complex.

**Balcony renovation:** Balcony renovation has been completed at 310 and has begun at 40. The evolution of how renovation has progressed illustrates the effectiveness of our committee.

When renovations began on the south face of 310, the entire bank of tenants—over 200 apartments—were told in May to remove all articles from the balconies. They were told that repairs would last at least 8 weeks—in fact, they lasted longer—that there was no way to notify single lines in order to reduce inconvenience and waiting times (who wants to live with porch furniture and plants for two months?), and they were given few guidelines on protecting against dust.

Tenants were angry; many refused to comply, and at the low point of our dealing with management, many tenants received a threatening note from management's lawyer. The BSC took immediate action on that one, and all notes from management regarding repairs pass through our committee. (It's important to state that, from the get go, even as procedures were bumpy, individual reps of management and maintenance provided help for tenants needing assistance in removing terrace articles.)

The BSC worked all summer to iron out the other difficulties. By the time work began on the west face, one line at a time was alerted, there were more guidelines in place for dust protection, tenants complied more quickly thereby speeding up repairs, and inconvenience lasted

running even more smoothly at 40 thanks to Vicki Green.

**Renovation of new apartments:** Some floors are on their fifth renovation. (There were three in the past year on my hall, so I know first hand what it's like.) For a while, the BSC had guidelines in place to reduce tenant inconvenience. These faded over time, and we are currently revving them up. They include: timely notification of renovations to apartments on either side and above and below the target apartment, daily vacuuming of carpets around apartment being renovated, and compliance with building codes. (Try taking a nap on Sunday to be awakened by cannon fire next door. We are vigilantly working to reduce such aberrations.) We have just arranged the shampooing of carpets after all renovations on a floor are completed to take care of the ground-in dirt and mildew from leaks created when workers leave water faucets on.

**Elevators:** 310 and 80 are just emerging from a month of reduced elevator service with one elevator down and others in continuous use by maintenance and workmen. The rush hours of 8 to 8:30 in the morning have been maddening for tenants who have to get to work or school.

Now that all elevator banks have been restored to service, management's guidelines are: 1) no workmen doing renovations are to use any elevator but the one designated for their purpose, and doormen are required to make them adhere to that guideline, and 2) building maintenance, i.e., trash collection, which ties up another elevator line, will not take place before 9:30 when the morning rush is over.

This is just a brief summary of our interactions with management on your behalf. Those of you who have contacted us know that we get back to you. If you have any problems that fall into the category of building services, first, call maintenance and try to get a work order. If you cannot get satisfactory results, call Tobias Sahl in management's office. If you need more assistance, please drop a note into your lobby box (with your contact info so we can call you) or e-mail [vclammer@aol.com](mailto:vclammer@aol.com) or [vicki40harrison@aol.com](mailto:vicki40harrison@aol.com). We can't work miracles, but we can swim upstream.

## ***IPN Tenants Host Benefit Here To Aid Animal Victims of Katrina***

**F**rustrated and disappointed that scant attention had been paid to the animal victims of Hurricane Katrina, IPN tenant April Lang decided to host a benefit to raise funds and increase people's awareness of their plight.

Lang, along with fellow IPN tenants Marnee May and Paul Staffile, and helped by IPNers Rhonda Capici, Robert Bower, Joan Rizzo, M.J. Bettenhausen, and Eric Fine put together an evening filled with music, vegetarian food and plenty of raffle prizes.

Dekk, a local eatery, was gracious enough to provide the venue for the event and willingly agreed to all-vegetarian hors d'oeuvres. As Lang explained her request, "it doesn't make sense to be helping some animals while eating others."

Paul Staffile, who orchestrated the evening's musical entertainment, drew upon a diverse group of talented performers, all of whom donated their time to this great cause. Some of the talent was local and included Staffile, Her, Diane Lapson, and Roina & Plaine while others, Michael Leonhart, Ross Pilot and Charlie Guitar, traveled to our neighborhood to participate.

Raffle queen Marnee May took charge of the raffle drawings both by actively seeking vendor donors and by making sure the drawings ran smoothly.

Many local businesses donated their wares, including Dudley's Paw, Daisy Dog Studio, Ula Day Spa, The Wagging Tail, Mailboxes, Etc., Cima Coffee House, Langdon Florists, and N.Y. Sports Club.

IPN residents Rose Horowitz and Sal Rizzo donated to the raffle as did Tribecan, Abbey Fromkin, acupuncturist. Out of area vendors included Tower Records, Bed Bath and Beyond, Time Warner, Counter Restaurant, Gobo Restaurant, Zen Palate, Candle 79 Restaurant, The Muse Hotel, Moo Shoes and the pet store, Beasty Feast. There were many lucky winners who got to take home "doggy bags."

Proceeds from the event all went to Noah's Wish, a not-for-profit animal welfare organization dedicated to keeping animals alive during disasters. Whether doing search and rescues or caring for the animals once they've been found, this organization travels far and wide to ensure that the animals are not the forgotten victims for long.

Anyone wishing to make a donation to Noah's Wish can mail a check to:

Noah's Wish  
P.O. Box 997  
Placerville, CA 95667

Their web address is [www.noahswish.org](http://www.noahswish.org).

### **Daffodils and Such on Greenwich**

**T**o: Friends of Greenwich Street

If you live at IPN, you've surely noticed the blooming trees and flowers along Greenwich Street. Many of us at the IPNTA are volunteers and Advisory Board members of this worthy organization. You probably saw us out with hoses in hand during this long dry summer. If planting interests you, we will be putting in daffodil bulbs for a bountiful spring. Join us on Nov. 19 at 10:00 at Greenwich and Harrison street.

All supplies will be provided and it will be a fun event!



## Changing of the Guard: Lynn Walsh Steps Down as Treasurer; Jean Hartman Assumes Role

**L**ynn Walsh has been our treasurer during the critical past four years. She has generously given her time to handle large membership drives, defense fund collections, bookkeeping for bill payments, etc. She has done a responsible job for us while at the same time running her own accounting business full time—and overtime during tax seasons.

Lynn has expressed her desire to retire from the position as treasurer at this time. We certainly can understand that, after putting in so much time and effort, she wants to focus on her own company and family. We sincerely appreciate all the devoted help she has given to us tenants at IPN.

Jean Hartman, the V.P. of 40 Harrison Street has substantial bookkeeping experience. She has offered to take over as Treasurer, and Lynn has been working with her for several months to make the transition.

In order for Jean to take over as Treasurer, we have asked Vicki Green, Vice President At Large, who lives in 40 Harrison Street, to take over the position of 40 Harrison's VP. Since Vicki is also very involved in voucher assistance and building services, Jean will offer her help as will our other VP at large, Felix Ortiz.

Thanks again to Lynn Walsh. As always, any member who would like to review the books, or discuss finances, is welcome to do so.

## Holiday Fund Drive for IPN Workers

**S**oon you will be receiving a note asking you to contribute to a holiday fund for porters and maintenance workers. Last year, enough money was raised to give \$640 each to 21 porters and \$440 apiece to 13 maintenance men (a lesser amount based on the theory that most tenants tip maintenance men at the time of repairs).

The holiday fund does not cover doormen, since tenants like to give individually to them.

A \$50 donation per apartment is suggested for the fund, but any amount you can afford is appreciated.

Last year, two tenant volunteers, June Grancio and Anita King, set up the drive and coordinated it with building VPs and volunteers in each

of the towers and townhouses. They have volunteered again this year. Wait for their letter explaining how to donate the money. And remember, this is our one chance each year to say "Thank you!"

