

Want protective legislation

Seniors back moratorium in condominium conversions

By JACKIE KLEIN

A growing number of elderly apartment dwellers in Southfield are calling for a moratorium on conversion of rental units to condominiums.

Senior citizens, who fear they'll be driven from their apartments by the conversion, packed the Southfield Parks and Recreation Building last Wednesday to hear about legislation proposed to protect tenants.

At Wednesday's public hearing of the Committee on Towns and Counties, many older renters on fixed incomes said nothing will help them except a three-year halt on conversions.

That measure would allow them time, in the hope the conversion trend will diminish or that some action will be taken to prevent tenants from being turned out, according to a number of seniors.

Members of the large audience also talked about forming a Southfield Tenant's Protection Association to give aging residents more power, especially at election time.

IT WOULD take three years for an owner of rental apartments to win state approval to convert them to con-

dominiums under a bill introduced in the Michigan Legislature by Rep. John Bennett, Redford Township Democrat.

The proposed legislation also provides that approval for conversions wouldn't be granted unless 50 percent or more of the apartment tenants agree to buy units. It would require that during the three-year waiting period, owners must advise tenants in writing once a year that an application is pending for conversion and they can buy their units.

Another measure introduced by Bennett requires that elderly tenants be given lifetime leases in any apartment project converted to condominiums.

Other bills have been introduced by State Rep. Joseph Forbes, an Oak Park Democrat and House Majority Floor Leader, whose district includes Southfield and Lathrup Village, and State Sen. Doug Ross, an Oak Park Democrat who represents Southfield, Lathrup Village, Farmington and Farmington Hills.

Their measures provide for life-lease options for senior citizens, increased notice to tenants, long-term financing loans for low- and middle-income persons who want to buy condominiums and loans for developers of converted

condominiums to cover expenses of the lifetime lease program.

"MOST RETIRED people say they can't afford to buy their units and they don't want to move," Ross said. "They want to stay where they are and pay reasonable rents. We expect legislation to pass quickly. Condo converts have shown they're willing to deal with the problem and are sensitive to it."

Among those who testified before the committee Wednesday was Mrs. Max Omos who said a moratorium would allow time to investigate condominium conversions in Michigan. About 48 per-

cent of rental units in the state are tied up in conversions or applications to convert, she said.

"The affect of this trend is that people of all ages must be homeowners if they like it or not," she said.

"There'll be a dearth of apartments. That means that older persons must live with their parents, and young persons must stack up together."

"Is the state going to provide psychological care for abused children and parents who have no place to go? Is it fair for developers to enslave while they reap the benefits? This country should be free for young old, middle

aged, poor and everybody else," Mrs. Omos added.

Attorney Ralph Goldsmith said he doesn't believe a moratorium is unconstitutional and "it's our only hope and salvation. The city can't declare a moratorium, but the state can," he said.

"Legislative bills get amended," he said. "These measures aren't passed over night. It took me two years to decide to sell my house and move into an apartment."

"We need at least a three-year holding action on conversions. If a good bill is passed, the moratorium can be

repealed. In the meantime, I could sleep nights."

Retired State Sen. Joseph Snyder, a St. Clair Shores Democrat, agreed that a moratorium would give renters breathing time. Apartments for senior citizens are alternatives to institutions and nursing homes, he said, and they can't afford to invest \$90,000 in a condominium.

VIRGINIA SHARKEY said she and her husband have lived in a townhouse in Farmington Hills for 10 years, and now it's being converted to a condominium.

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