

# NEW JERSEY

NEWARK

## City Council OKs rent control on new apartments



The Newark Urby apartment complex was recently converted from a 12-story parking garage into 250 living spaces. A city ordinance adopted Wednesday limits rent increases to 5% a year in newly constructed buildings. *Tyrone Z. McCants, for The Star-Ledger*

**Ordinance approved by 6-3 vote addresses units exempted by state law from limits on rent hikes.**

**Steve Strunsky** *For The Star-Ledger*

The Newark City Council on Wednesday adopted an ordinance that limits rent increases to 5% a year in newly constructed buildings that had been exempt from rent control by a state law intended to encourage housing construction.

The 6-3 vote pit supporters who say rising rents were fueling a “housing crisis” in Newark, making the city unaffordable to longtime residents, against opponents who insist that it will discourage new construction and serve outsiders who could afford to move into “luxury” apartments built during the city’s decade-long building boom.

Council President Lamonica McIver, who supported the measure, said it would protect new and longtime Newark residents, including low- and moderate-income people who live in affordable units required in any new building under the city’s inclusionary zoning ordinance.

“Everybody that lives in new development is not new to the City of Newark,” McIver said.

Last month, the council introduced the ordinance after Mayor Ras J. Baraka proposed it to address a growing affordability problem in the state’s largest city. Newark continues to lag behind the state in per capita income and other economic indexes



The Vermella Broad Street project will add 296 apartments to Newark’s Lower Broad Street neighborhood. *Steve Strunsky, for The Star-Ledger*

while leading the state in people living in shelters and on the street.

In 1987, state lawmakers sought to boost New Jersey’s housing supply by exempting newly constructed buildings from local rent control ordinances for 30 years or the length of their financing.

Newark’s ordinance takes advantage of a provision in the statute, 2A:42-84.1, allowing municipalities to protect tenants against “unconscionable” rent hikes, though the law does not specify what that means, leaving it to housing court judges to decide on a case-by-case basis.

The maximum allowable increase was originally put at 5% every two years when the council first took up the ordinance on May 3, but later changed to 5% annually. Violations carry a \$1,250 fine.

The city has a separate rent control ordinance that applies to older housing not exempted by state law, limiting annual increases to the level of the consumer price index or 4%, whichever is lower.

Members of the public applauded the council’s vote at the afternoon meeting, where several spoke in support of the measure.

“I’m a Newark resident, and I can’t afford to live here,” said Tallaucha Hunter, 52, a disabled grandmother who was born

and raised in the city. “Where am I going to go?”

Hunter’s question echoed a point by David Troutt, founding director of the Rutgers Center on Law, Inequality and Metropolitan Equity (CLiME). He has authored recent reports chronicling Newark’s affordability problem, which has grown as market-rate development has migrated west from Jersey City, one of the most expensive real estate markets in the country.

“The city has, in many respects, become a playground for outside investors,” Troutt said of Newark. “The affordability crisis in Newark is getting worse and likely to get much worse over time.”

One member of the public who spoke against the measure was Nicholas Kikis, vice president for legislative and regulatory affairs at the New Jersey Apartment Association, which represents landlords.

Kikis said he recognized the growing affordability problem in Newark, but he told council members, “The ordinance before you is the wrong solution to that crisis.” Referring to the 1987 statute, he added that the ordinance “does not comply with state law.”

On Wednesday, the city’s corporation counsel, Kenyatta Stewart, defended the measure’s legality.

Along with McIver, Councilmembers C. Lawrence Crump, Louise Scott-Rountree, Patrick Council, Dupré Kelly and Michael Silva voted for the ordinance. Councilmembers Luis Quintana, Carlos Gonzalez and Anibal Ramos voted against it.

Ramos said one of his constituents’ rents doubled even though he lived in an older, rent-controlled building. Asserting that the city was failing to enforce its existing rent control ordinance, Ramos questioned how it could extend its efforts to new buildings occupied mainly by wealthier new residents.

“This ordinance won’t do anything but benefit those tenants who are able to afford that opening rent moving forward,” he said.

HANOVER TWP.

## Sued by state, district revises policy on LGBTQ students

**Controversial parental notification protocol repealed, replaced with a new version.**

**Jackie Roman** *For The Star-Ledger*

The Hanover Township Board of Education voted Tuesday to repeal a controversial policy that would have outed LGBTQ+ students to their parents and instead replaced it with a revised version.

The revised policy is meant to address concerns of discrimination raised in a lawsuit filed against the Board of Education by the New Jersey attorney general. In a letter addressed to Morris County Assignment Judge Stuart Minkowitz, Matthew R. Marotta, an attorney for the school board, said the state’s order to show cause was “moot” given the board’s repeal and replacement of the contested policy.

The Attorney General’s Office did not immediately respond Thursday to a request for comment.

On May 16, the Hanover Township Board of Education, which oversees K-8 students in Whippany and Cedar Knolls, passed a policy requiring all school staff to notify parents when becoming aware of about 30 circumstances that could impact students, including their sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression.

The next day, Attorney General Matthew Platkin and Sundee Iyer, director of the Division on Civil Rights, filed suit against the board and requested a temporary injunction to keep the policy from taking effect.

The state argues that the board’s policy violates the state’s Law Against Discrimination because it discriminates based on sexual orientation or gender identity or expression, requiring parental notification for lesbian, **SEE DISTRICT, B3**

LONG-TERM CARE

## Veterans home starts \$500k remedy for possible mold

**Remediation at state-owned Menlo Park facility follows discovery of “discolored” drywall in 11 rooms.**

**Ted Sherman and Susan K. Livio** *For The Star-Ledger*

The Veterans Memorial Home at Menlo Park in Edison, which was the target of federal sanctions earlier this year over major shortcomings in care, has embarked on a costly, months-long mold remediation project after a whistleblower said he raised an alarm over conditions in the building.

Officials would neither confirm the presence of mold nor rule it out, describing the dark staining on walls that could be seen in photos of the facility only as a “discoloration.”

At least 11 rooms were found to have discolored drywall, according to officials at the 312-bed state-operated nursing home for veterans and their spouses. They said the problems were discovered not by the whistleblower, but in the course of regular inspections.

“We are concerned about mold,” acknowledged Lisa Kranis, the chief executive officer at Menlo Park, in a letter to staff, residents and families last Friday. She said an outside consultant conducted two site visits the week of May 15, leading to the decision to immediately move forward with an abatement plan.

“Abatement will involve cutting and replacing portions of the drywall in impacted rooms,” she wrote.

Another 17 rooms had leaky toilet **SEE REMEDIATION, B3**

STATEWIDE

## Lawmakers propel vehicle to aid one district

**Committee advances measure to restore courtesy busing for Freehold Regional.**

**Rob Jennings** *For The Star-Ledger*

Legislation that could restore courtesy busing to thousands of students in a Monmouth County regional school district moved forward Thursday in the state Legislature.

The bill, A5575, was approved by the Assembly Education Committee amid objections that the legislation would benefit only the Freehold Regional High School District, which has six high schools and

serves students from eight municipalities.

Officials in Freehold Regional blamed annual state aid cuts, totaling \$25 million since 2018, when the school board voted April 27 to end courtesy busing for approximately 3,000 students starting in September.

Under New Jersey law, school districts are required to provide free bus transportation for high school students if they live 2.5 miles or more from their schools. For students in grades K through 8, the threshold is 2 miles or more.

Some districts provide free transportation — called courtesy busing — for students who live closer than the threshold outlined in the law.

Eliminating courtesy busing will save Freehold Regional \$3.5 million during

the 2023-24 school year, district officials said. Freehold Regional officials said they are considering restoring the cut bus routes under an optional subscription busing plan, but parents who opt in would have to pay for their children to take the bus to school.

The three-page Assembly bill, sponsored by Assembly Speaker Craig Coughlin, D-Middlesex, does not mention Freehold Regional. But, the legislation creates a set of circumstances, tailored to Freehold Regional, that would exempt the school district from state aid cuts and give it enough money to restore courtesy busing.

To qualify, a district would need to meet several criteria, including being a **SEE BUSING, B3**