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Suit Alleges Illegal Evictions at Hotel

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Community activists filed a lawsuit Thursday in U.S. District Court in Los Angeles alleging that city agencies stood idly by while dozens of residents at the Alexandria Hotel were illegally evicted and that basic services were not provided for remaining tenants.



“I haven’t taken a bath in a month,” said Leonard Woods, who has lived at the Alexandria for a decade. “There’s no hot water. The elevator doesn’t work. Is that severe enough for you?”

Woods, 53, spoke at a news conference with other residents to announce the lawsuit against the hotel, the developer, manager Logan Property Management Inc., the city of Los Angeles and its Community Redevelopment Agency.

“I have lived at the Alexandria for 10 years, nine of them have been good, but the last year has been a living hell,” said Woods, who requires a motorized wheelchair to get around. “I’ve been stressed to the max on this.”

Built in 1906 at 5th and Spring streets as a luxury hotel, the Alexandria has been a residential hotel since the early 1990s.

In recent years it has been at the center of a fight between developers and community groups over its best use.

Purchased by Ruben Islas in 2006, the hotel symbolizes a larger problem downtown: how to provide low-income housing and combat homelessness while still providing avenues for redevelopment.

Casey Horan, director of Lamp Community, an advocacy group for the disadvantaged, said the developer has been squeezing low-income and disabled residents out of the hotel in order to make room for wealthier clientele in the newly renovated hotel.

“It was really one of the premiere” hotels with affordable rates for low-income tenants, Horan said. “Things changed dramatically.”

The complaint alleges that Islas’ Amerland Group, which specializes in building affordable and senior housing, and the managing partners they hired have “systematically and intentionally worked to remove the long-term tenants of the Alexandria and replace them with non-elderly, non-disabled and non-African American tenants.”

The 80 residents who were evicted received no relocation assistance, the complaint alleges. Other residents were given partial evictions.

In one case, 71-year-old Hilda Quintana, who has been living at the hotel since 1982, returned to find she had been evicted from two of her three rooms and “all of her belongings were thrown into this single room and her sofa and other furniture were left upside down. Ms. Quintana was given no prior notice of this partial eviction.”

Islas was unavailable for comment Thursday. But he has said publicly that he has not broken any laws, that activists are exaggerating the living conditions of residents and that there have been fewer than 30 evictions.

CRA officials said in a statement Thursday that they had not reviewed the legal complaint but shared the “concerns expressed by tenants at the Alexandria Hotel regarding health and safety, habitability and tenants’ rights issues... . We fully expect the developer to comply with all laws.”

Pete White, director of the Los Angeles Community Action Network, whose staff organized residents at the Alexandria and pursued the lawsuit, said local government agencies such as the CRA are letting owners get away with substandard living conditions.

Such agencies have provided funding for redevelopment of the hotel, White said, while simultaneously ignoring the plight of disabled and elderly residents.

“We have shaken the bushes and rattled the trees, and the local government has turned its backs on us,” White said.