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N.Y. Panel Hikes Rent Less Than Usual

By CARA BUCKLEY

Rents for New York City's one million rent-stabilized apartments will rise less than in the past several years under increases set Thursday evening at a typically raucous public meeting.

The city's nine-person [Rent Guidelines Board](#) approved rent increases of 2.25 percent for one-year leases and 4.5 percent for two-year leases. The increases apply to leases renewed between Oct. 1, 2010, and Sept. 30, 2011.

While the proceedings resembled those of other years, the meeting this year, at Cooper Union, had some differences: One board member lashed out at elected leaders, while another broke down in tears.

"I know this is going to have an impact on tenants, and I'm so sorry," Adriene Holder, a board member who had initially pushed for a rent freeze, said tearfully before voting for the increase.

Earlier in the meeting, another board member, Risa A. Levine, criticized elected leaders for not tackling rent reform and said it was "imperative that we look beyond the annual chimera" that the rent guidelines board meetings had become.

In a statement that won her fellow board members' vocal support, Ms. Levine said the board was unfairly saddled with the impossible task of trying to balance the needs of tenants with the demands of landlords. The tenants are worried about paying bills, while the landlords face rising taxes and operational costs.

Invariably, she said, both sides have been left unhappy. It would be far more effective, she said, for low-income housing programs to be expanded.

Ms. Levine's words were soon drowned out by boos and yelling from an agitated crowd of tenants, who have long used the annual meeting as a forum to vent their frustrations over the city's soaring housing costs.

The approved increases, criticized as too large by tenants and too small by landlords, could have been higher. At a preliminary

meeting in May, the board voted to consider increases of up to 4 percent for one-year leases and up to 6 percent for two-year leases. Last year, the board approved increases of 3 percent on one-year leases and 6 percent on two-year leases.

In recent weeks, housing advocates have made the case for freezing rents. Among them was Christine C. Quinn, speaker of the City Council, who noted that about 400,000 New Yorkers were out of work.

While Nassau and Westchester Counties have approved rent freezes on their rent-stabilized units, it has never happened in New York City.

The number of rent-stabilized apartments in the city continues to fall. About 10,000 such units were lost in 2009, according to a study by the Rent Guidelines Board that was released this month; it was the largest net loss since at least 2003.

Several board members said that landlords, too, were faced with increased costs. According to another study by the board, the overall price of running rent-stabilized buildings rose 3.4 percent from May 2009 to March 2010.

Joseph Strasburg, president of the [Rent Stabilization Association](#), which represents thousands of landlords, said 10 percent of the city's low-income rental units were endangered because owners had fallen behind in real estate taxes and municipal fees. He said the city should subsidize tenants and give property owners tax credits, rather than leave the matter up to the Rent Guidelines Board.

"This is a process that continues to pit landlords against tenants," he said.