

Issue 03
May 2026

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Easthampton Tenants Union

Monthly News and Updates



Task Force Enables Citywide Housing Crisis Coordination

In March, the City Council passed a resolution that acknowledges the housing crisis, while recognizing the efforts already underway to address it, including the housing production plan, financial support for affordable housing projects, and the Affordable and Fair Housing Partnership's exploration of zoning reform. It also identifies actions the city could pursue in the future, such as forming a community land or housing trust, pursuing a rent stabilization home rule petition, and exploring additional public or social housing.

The resolution highlights unfavorable rental market practices enabled by the housing shortage, including unfair rental agreements, unreasonable and sudden rent hikes, maintenance neglect, and unfair eviction tactics. It also recognizes and includes the critical work of community advocates, such as the ETU, who have direct experience with housing insecurity and the challenges in the current market.

The task force enabled by this resolution consists of key participants in the city's housing policy: the chairs of the Housing Partnership, Rent Study Committee, Planning Board, and Housing Authority, our district's state legislative delegation, the directors of the Planning and Public Health Departments, and an ETU member. They will meet at least once a year to align on priorities and ensure whole-of-government coordination to solve the housing crisis. Including state legislators allows for better coordination of efforts at the state and local levels.

Another function is a city-redirect email that allows the task force to send housing updates to everyone in the group. This will allow members to quickly and easily share new information, updates, and notices of key discussions across public bodies in the city. The goal is to avoid duplicating efforts, encourage the sharing of knowledge and expertise, and make it easier to track all the work being done to address the housing crisis.

– Kiam Jamrog-McQuaid
City Councilor at Large



Darcy, Jeff, Natalia, Alex, Kelley, and Amy shared their stories, insights, and experiences.

Organizing Heats Up in Greenfield ETU Members Bring Energy and Info to Stone Soup Cafe

On April 21, members of the Easthampton Tenants Union trekked up to Greenfield to share stories, insights, and strategies with a wide range of residents from Gill, Sunderland, Greenfield, Great Falls, Northampton, and even as far as Holyoke and Springfield.

The event, co-hosted by the Building Solidarity Economies (BSE) project, was held at Stone Soup Cafe, a vibrant community hub with a pay-what-you-can service model. BSE regularly hosts workshops at Stone Soup, inviting community organizations and mutual aid groups to share their work and build power through storytelling, skill-sharing, and community gathering.

Participants shared a delicious meal prepared by the cafe staff, and ETU members presented a panel-style workshop using personal stories of their fights against their landlords to deliver an informative training on tenant rights, how to do outreach, and how to start a tenants union.

The panel consisted of representatives of key tenant associations comprising ETU, each with a unique scenario, providing specific insights into topics such as navigating the eviction process, refusing a rent increase, and utilizing the local Board of Health as a leverage tool.

One member who recently joined ETU is a resident of Greenfield and has started to organize tenants there. Members from Easthampton joined the kickoff meeting on May 11 to help start a tenant movement in Franklin County. [story on p. 3]

The Stone Soup event was a massive success, generating poignant questions, conversation, and reflection. The energy in the room was palpable as many folks were learning their rights as renters for the first time in their lives. ETU is looking forward to lending further support to the Greenfield tenant community as they embark on their mission to formally organize and build tenant power.

– Natalia Ruiz

Meetings Every Thursday
5:30 to 7:00 p.m.
City Council Chambers
Easthampton Municipal Building
50 Payson Avenue



Website & Social Media



Contact Info

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Finding Community After a Steep Rent Increase

For Don Chevannes, a longtime veterans' services volunteer, solidarity is an intersectional practice

I've been with Pine Valley since, I think it's been 15 years. After I moved out from the VA, from Soldier On, I moved to Florence. Then I kind of outgrew that apartment. I needed somewhere to go, and I ended up at the Pine Valley office. The rent at that time was \$700. It would go up periodically, not a lot, like maybe every two years, but it's gone all the way up now, up to \$1,500. Prior to that it was \$925.

When I got the notice, it was like, oh boy, that's a big jump. I didn't know what my rights were, and was I really going to try to fight it? I didn't know if I had the tools to do it – the people, or the contacts, or a lawyer. I wondered if it was really worth staying where I'm at for \$1,500 a month.

So I'm thinking, maybe I should just find a way out. Until one day my neighbor Kelley Hutchins told me that there was a lady that came around, whose name was Mona, knocking on doors. At that point I really didn't take it seriously enough to say, I gotta check this out. I think I'm like a lot of other people, the first hit of that news and that information, we're on our heels and we don't really know what to do.



Kelley mentioned something about renters getting together. I thought that was a good idea, because I ask the same thing of veterans in what I do. They run into a crisis and they need some kind of support, and sometimes that support is just information. That's what I do for a lot of the guys, and women, who are veterans.

My thing was, now I'm on the other end, now I'm one of those that need help. I said, I should just pursue this. Because again, I don't know what I'm going to be facing – is this going to develop into something, or is this going to be one of those things where we shout and scream and we get all our anger out, and then everything else just dissipates, so nobody's really pursuing nothing?

But I found out totally different. I was kind of in awe to see how many people are taking this really seriously and are doing something about it, they're not just talking. What I'm getting is the enthusiasm, the tenacity, the determination, all of those things I'm picking up with everybody. Even people who may not be able to be that mobile, seniors like myself, young people who are energetic. This is beautiful.

They asked me to write something and I did, I wrote about the people, the reasons why I moved to Easthampton and what I loved about it – it's a small town, it's quiet.

Then I get a call from the landlord. What happened was, when she read the letter, she thought it was a lie. She called Mona, said, "You need to take this off the Instagram because this is not true. We don't know who this is." And Mona must have said, "Oh no, that is one of your tenants." So she really didn't know me.

After that, she offered me, "Don't pay the rent for February, okay?" I was like, huh, they're making me an offer here so my rent won't go up that amount. But then realizing the support of all those people that come to the meetings, there's no way I could take it. So I emailed her back and said, "Listen, I appreciate the offer, but there are so many other people that are less fortunate than myself, and I'd rather see them get the benefit of this first." I never heard back from her.

Because what I learned in the service is there's a solidarity. Those who are wounded or not that you may have to help, there's a certain solidarity that I learned that I bring with me out here also. Usually my interaction is always with veterans. Now I'm getting really into action with people in the community that's been here longer than I have and know what this town is about. When you come here, that's what you want to do, you want to settle. You don't want to be like dust, where you just get blown away in another direction.

Tenants Say "Sell Our Home to Us!"

Barely one year after buying our building, Hurricane Properties, a private equity firm based in South Carolina, let us know they're selling it due to "financial setbacks."

A realtor friend called their realtor to get more info. She said this is what they do, they buy properties and flip them quickly to make a profit. But that doesn't line up with their business model. They brag about building their \$30 million portfolio. They "aggressively raise rents to offset increased costs." We organized and didn't let them do that to us, so they're bailing.

With help from the Cooperative Development Institute, the Cooperative Fund of the Northeast, the Valley Community Land Trust, and other supporters, we intend to buy the building.

Shortly after a prominent "for sale" sign went up, we put up our own sign near the front door. The real estate agent apparently let the Florida-based property manager know. She texted us, citing the clause in the lease that forbids signs on the property. We found out the strip of grass between the sidewalk and the street belongs to the city, so we moved it there. Now it's even more visible.

Weeks ago, the property manager gave us proper notice for two realtor visits with prospective buyers, but we didn't cooperate. She cited the lease on this too. But we didn't obstruct anyone. They're legally allowed to come in. Good management would include a responsible local person with spare keys. Instead, they have the front door key in a lockbox and a disorganized maintenance guy.



Hurricane's partners could do the right thing and give us a legitimate chance, but they've proven that they don't care about tenants and don't take us seriously. We plan to wear them down so they'll give up, accept a low offer, cut their losses, and leave us alone. We also worry that they'll do a hasty back-door deal with a larger, even more inhumane investment company. Whatever happens, we know that organized resistance, solidarity, and collective action have gotten us this far and will continue to sustain our efforts.

– Ilene Roizman

Greenfield Tenants Union Has Packed Info Session

In February, after receiving notice of a 40% rent increase, a longtime Greenfield resident reached out to ETU for help. Seeing the collective power of the union, she decided to bring this energy to her town. On May 11, after weeks of flyering and Facebook posts, the Greenfield library community room was filled with interested residents.

ETU members were there to share the origins of our organizing, personal stories of wins and losses, and basic tenants' rights. Greenfield residents came with questions, grievances, and loads of energy. Some building groups already had tenant associations underway.

Folks in Greenfield spoke with fervor and frustration about their unacceptable living conditions. "We should have a baseline of a healthy safe place to be. This should not be miraculous," one renter said. Another resident shared distress over a union-busting lease that prohibits knocking on neighbors' doors without their prior permission. Others are experiencing maintenance neglect, manipulative communication from landlords, and rent increases on subsidized housing without the income to match. On increasing rents, one person said, "I feel like I'm stuck and I'm drowning. The water rises and I don't float any higher."

There were also voices of doubt in the room. The fight for dignified homes is not new to renters. Will rent control make it onto the November ballot and pass? Will landlords change their tune with enough pressure, or will they find new ways to exploit renters for profit? These fears are real and the stakes are high.

Nevertheless, there is undeniable truth to the power we hold as a collective. A longtime Greenfield resident said that for years she had requested repairs for a back door that didn't latch properly. Recently she was injured when she fell through the door – while also dealing with rent increases and other neglected maintenance. On the same day Facebook posts went up about the tenants' meeting, her landlord fixed the door.

Over and over, at ETU and beyond, we see power in numbers. If the mere mention of tenants organizing on Facebook can push a landlord toward accountability, it's clear we're on the right track. As Greenfield continues to organize, tenant power across the Valley strengthens. We will not stop until all of our neighbors have the homes they deserve.

– Noah Waxman

Making Progress at Cottage Square

Two Cottage Square tenants, Sue and Jean, have been encouraging their neighbors to meet so they can address rent increases and maintenance issues together. As a complicating factor, their corporate landlord gets low-income housing tax credit (LIHTC) subsidies. That's made it difficult for them to determine how to proceed with collective action. Sue reports:

"We are continuing to pursue a better understanding of how different types of apartments are handled in this LIHTC facility. Jean and I met with Veronica, legislative aide to state Rep. Homar Gomez, who was helpful in finding us a good resource at the Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities. Unfortunately, they're swamped, so getting hold of anyone there is still a work in progress. Jean also found another contact who has dealt with this exact situation in Springfield and Holyoke, so we will follow up on that."

After attending a workshop on how to talk to residents about the budget override, Sue noted that the skills they learned will translate well to talking to tenants about organizing.

Rent Negotiation Stalls for Pine Valley Tenants

On May 7, the Pine Valley Tenants' Association met with Matthew and Donna Gawle for a third collective bargaining session. Unlike previous meetings, the Gawles did not bring legal counsel, documents, or any requested financial information.

Donna said they were still struggling to consolidate financial records across their various holdings. She claimed that Crown Meadow, one of their LLCs, was not included because it has no residential tenants, and stated that Matthew has no involvement with Pine Valley Realty Corp., which she distinguished from Pine Valley Real Estate. She also referenced other entities that she said were currently in dissolution, though that is not visible in the public records. She added that their income information could be reviewed through tax records.

When Mona Shadi pressed the Gawles on whether they were willing to begin negotiating on items such as an annual cap on rent increases, the conversation shifted to the upcoming special election for a city budget override on June 9. Donna said they can't know what they'll be capable of until they see the outcome of the vote and determine whether their property taxes will be reassessed. She said they don't think they can promise anything in a deficit because there are "so many unknowns."

This came immediately after Mona repeated ongoing tenant concerns, including health and safety hazards in buildings and sudden rent increases as high as 60%, while she reiterated the association's willingness to compromise.

Ultimately, the Gawles tied any meaningful collective bargaining to the outcome of the June 9 election. While they stopped short of explicitly refusing negotiations, they offered no concrete indication that their position would change. Some tenants expressed concern that negotiations would continue to be delayed regardless of the election's outcome, potentially extending until after the statewide rent control ballot measure vote in November.

Donna again offered to "mediate with individuals," a proposal tenants criticized as an attempt to sidestep negotiating with the association collectively. Once it became clear that no substantive collective bargaining would occur, Mona adjourned the meeting, and the tenants continued discussing strategy privately.

– Jade Dianthus

Since the meeting, Pine Valley tenants have used social media to pressure the Gawles to negotiate in earnest and continue to investigate their questionable business practices. Further actions are being planned.

Our defining values:

Resiliency: By developing networks and systems of mutual support and defense, we can adapt to changes and be prepared for challenges with flexibility and resiliency.

Solidarity: By consistently working together in solidarity with a commitment to serving the greater good, we can have significant leverage to catalyze change.

Inclusivity: By respecting our neighbors and accepting our differences, we can strengthen the community for everyone. The basis of inclusivity is unity, not uniformity.

Self-determination: By providing education and empowering people to stand up for their rights as residents of Massachusetts, we can foster housing self-determination.

Equity: By encouraging a leader-full organization with everyone on an equal footing, we can promote equity among members and throughout the community.

What guides us:

Consensus decision-making: Everyone's voice counts.

Transparency: Trust depends on open sharing of organizational operations.

Political imagination: Changing the status quo requires pushing boundaries.

Communication/outreach: Education is key, and knowledge is power.

News Bits, Other Meetings, Upcoming Activities

Alliances are strengthening, the union is growing, and our reach is expanding



Our mission is to empower people to stand up for their legal rights and foster solidarity across the city of Easthampton and the surrounding community.

ETU Book Club

As part of our mission to promote knowledge sharing, we formed an education committee and started a study group. The first text is a report titled "Our Homes, Our Future," which is about the benefits of rent control and how to win it. Access the report on our website: [Media](#) → [Research & Policy](#) → [Next Page](#).

Our Meetings Are Hybrid!

The Google Meet link is included in our weekly emails. Sign up at easthamptontenantsunion.org.

ETU Supports Easthampton City Budget Override

On May 7, we voted to publicly support voting yes on the proposed city budget override. We believe that the consequences of failing to fund essential city services would fall disproportionately on tenants, low-income households, seniors, and working families. We are concerned that tenants are likely to bear much of the burden through rent increases by unscrupulous landlords.

We believe the override debate and the rent control campaign are deeply connected, pointing to broader questions about who gets to remain in Easthampton as costs continue to rise. This endorsement reflects our broader commitment to protect the social infrastructure that makes the community stable, healthy, and democratic. The override vote is scheduled for June 9.

Other Meetings in Easthampton

The City Council meets on the first and third Wednesday of the month at 6 pm. In June, meetings are on the 3rd and 17th.

The Rent Study Committee meets on the first Tuesday of the month at 6 pm.

"Overwhelming public and political support for rent control continues to grow from the urgency of the crisis, persistent on-the-ground organizing by tenants and allies, and shifting tides in conventional economic thinking."

From the report "Our Homes, Our Future"



ETU and Springfield No One Leaves visited the State House in April to support the rent control ballot measure.

"Democracy must be built through open societies that share information. When there is information, there is enlightenment. When there is debate, there are solutions." – Atifete Jahjaga (jahjagafoundation.org)