

Issue 04
June 2026

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Easthampton Tenants Union

Monthly News and Updates



Tenant Solidarity Is Global

People everywhere are building power and working for change. Jacob Stringer, a seasoned UK-based organizer, covers the global phenomenon in his book *Renters Unite! How Tenant Unions Are Fighting the Housing Crisis*. He offered some highlights in an interview with his publisher:

"Some key lessons from tenant organizing around the world are to build for the long term, because you won't defeat a housing crisis in six months, and to reach out beyond those who will choose to seek out your organization."

"In the book I talk quite a lot about the Los Angeles Tenant Union, who really inspire me because of their emphasis on learning. They see that we can always be learning from each other, and that the organization needs to change as its membership changes."

"Some of the victories I love the most are disputes that really drag on, and where the union has become concerned that it can't actually win the fight, but members stick together and keep at it because their bonds of solidarity are so strong. I talk about one dispute in the book where the London Renters Union spent months in conflict with a particular estate agent, and at various points individuals felt disheartened, but they carried each other along, and the victory when it came was all the sweeter."

"We need to see more public control of housing, so that it isn't a commodity exploited by private investors. That means resourcing the purchasing and building of houses under democratic public control. There's no solution to the housing crisis while housing is seen as a lucrative private investment."



Budget Override Narrowly Passes

Impact is minimized, but long-term fallout is unknown

Passing the override means avoiding the anticipated catastrophic cuts in positions and services, but cuts must still be made to balance the budget for fiscal year 2027.

For the city government, this mainly includes cuts to professional development and in-state travel budgets, and reduced hours for the sustainability coordinator (who can be supplemented with grants). It was also decided to cancel funding for the police department's Flock cameras.

For the school district, the main outcome is the elimination of several staff positions. Also on the chopping block are on-site wireless access for students and teachers, the late after-school bus at Mountain View, and some clubs and activities with low enrollment. Another effect of tightening the budget is having to curtail the number of school choice slots, and there won't be enough funds to invest in things that attract students from other districts.

It's not clear what other changes will be needed as costs continue to rise. There will be many discussions and debates on this at city council and committee meetings in the coming months. We should expect transparency throughout the entire budgetary process.

There has been talk of assistance programs for homeowners struggling to pay the increased property tax. But there will be no such assistance for renters whose landlords raise rents in response to the same increase.

The ETU will keep asking the city government to strengthen tenant protections and push for a reasonable rent control policy. We're aligning with a developing "Williston Can Afford It" campaign to urge the tax-exempt school to opt in to PILOT (payment in lieu of taxes). We'll work on building community and boosting mutual aid.

Meetings Every Thursday
5:30 to 7:00 p.m.

City Council Chambers
Easthampton Municipal Building
50 Payson Avenue



Website & Social Media



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Overcoming Powerlessness and Feeling Less Alone

Exercising your rights should never cost you your home, but that’s what almost happened to me. For the entirety of my tenancy, eight years or so, my apartment lacked sufficient heat. The landlords made “for show” efforts that fixed nothing, and it’s been like pulling teeth to get them to do even that much. They knew about the heating, and other issues, but they’ve rarely addressed anything unless we hound them.

The feeling of powerlessness, and the freezing winter temperatures, drove me to withhold rent starting in November. When they finally addressed the heat four months later, they served me a no-fault notice to quit, hoping I would essentially take the months of unpaid rent money and run. An eviction noticed followed a month later.

The notice left me feeling terrified and powerless once again. It feels so vulnerable and destabilizing. How could I fight this alone? Where could I even move? Our housing market has become egregiously unaffordable, and when I sought free legal help, I hit a wall.

Despite right to counsel legislation, state funding is so lacking that Community Legal Aid could only assist people with housing vouchers. Without a voucher, I was entirely on my own, facing an eviction and trying to piece together a legal defense without any experience.

Everything changed because of a single message. I posted in a Signal chat to warn another renter about the lack of legal aid, mentioning my own retaliatory eviction. Someone privately messaged me and pointed me toward the Easthampton Tenants Union. I filled out the contact form, and the response was immediate.

In that first phone call, they shared the union’s battles and victories, offered resources, and reflected my experience in a way that made me feel seen and much less alone. They reminded me that I could win this case if I fought, and that the union would stand by my side. Sitting in my first meeting that week, listening to people’s stories and taking in as much as I could about the work they were doing, I knew I had found my people.

Over the next few weeks, the ETU connected me with a law firm that took my case and also urged me to call the Board of Health to request an inspection. Today, thanks to that push, I am the only tenant in my building with working heat, safe windows, a secure front door, sturdy handrails, and new porch stairs.

I’m at the beginning of this legal battle, but my attorney and I are confident that we will win. And I am part of an incredibly dedicated group of brilliant people fighting this fight every single day and helping other renters stand up for their right to decent and affordable housing.

This doesn’t fix our region’s housing crisis, or tell me where I will go if I eventually move. But right now, I get to choose if and when I do. And my landlords are not getting away with using my safety as a means of vengeance. They tried to retaliate because they thought I was alone and they could. But through hyperlocal grassroots organizing by people in my community, this personal injustice became collective power.

– Darcy Clifford

Got a Rent Raise? Try Organizing!

As we work for rent control regulations, local landlords will still try to increase rents, and tenants need to be prepared. If you receive notice of a rent increase, you have three options: agree to pay and stay, try to negotiate, or refuse and move.

Many Easthampton tenants have paid huge rent increases because they didn’t know negotiation was an option. Here’s a quick look at what can happen if you don’t agree to an increase. (Quotes from MassLegalHelp.org.)

First, “Without your agreement, a rent increase notice is simply a one-sided demand from your landlord.” It’s not legally enforceable. You can still pay your current rent.

Depending on your relationship with your landlord and the rental situation, one way to respond is to make a counteroffer. But for many tenants, experience has shown that it’s more effective to join with your neighbors and organize for collective bargaining.

“As part of a tenant group, you can learn together about your legal rights and organizing strategies, research who really owns and controls your building, get support from tenant advocacy organizations and elected officials, and use your collective power to negotiate with the landlord for fair rents and better conditions.” Research should also include finding out the landlord’s expenses and verifying what the rent raise is based on.

This is what the ETU is all about: supporting tenant groups in their collective bargaining efforts. We’ve seen some success, but we’ve also seen that landlords can refuse to negotiate.

This is where the “collective” part is especially impactful. If one or two tenants don’t agree and refuse to pay an increase, the landlord can resort to no-fault eviction. It’s expensive, but they’ll do it anyway as a power move. Even then, tenants can win. We’ve seen this happen too.



However, if dozens of tenants with the same landlord refuse to pay an increase, eviction becomes a less appealing option. (Note that we’re not talking about large corporations that can easily absorb the cost of mass evictions.) And if several tenant groups with different landlords join together, that creates a new power dynamic.

We know there’s strength in numbers. But it takes commitment, persistence, and action to get things done. It requires strategizing, coordinating, and communicating with our neighbors. Negotiating rent increases collectively is a critical tactic we can use to assert our rights and ultimately take control over our housing.

Listening Sessions Show
Sharp Contrast in Views

The Rent Study Committee’s first listening session on May 14 was regarded by many attendees as a resounding success. Ten ETU members presented prepared statements about their experience renting in town, and five of them also proposed concrete policies for the committee to consider. These policies were vacancy penalties, a dollar limit on rent increases, tenant option to purchase, mandatory health and building inspections before rent increases, and the creation of a registry of landlords and rental units. In addition to the ETU members, three residents spoke in support of rent stabilization.

The session for landlords and developers the following week made for quite a sharp contrast. Attendance was notably smaller, with just under a dozen members of the public and fewer than half actually speaking. As anticipated, general sentiment among the audience was less favorable to rent stabilization.

Among the points raised was the idea that the true cause of recent rent hikes was the influx of corporate landlords from out of state, with local landlords raising rents in response to that. However, this attempt to pass the blame to corporate landlords didn’t prevent at least one property owner from threatening to sell his units to a corporation. Also raised were the difficulties surrounding adjustable-rate mortgages (ARMs), which have increased in cost due to recently elevated interest rates, as well as increased maintenance and materials costs.

Not all of those at the second meeting were opposed to the idea of rent stabilization. A local landlord who uses their property as a way to help trans people relocate from the Deep South said, “It’s very hard to sit and listen to more professional landlords talk about the game of extraction. If we’re looking at renting as an investment, and you can’t afford to keep your investment without raising rents on working people in this town, then I think you made a bad investment.”

The committee had its regular monthly meeting on June 2 to digest the findings from the listening sessions. Committee members were notably sympathetic to tenants, and had a particularly favorable opinion on imposing a dollar limit on rent raises. An in-depth discussion of a landlord registry was also proposed, with the understanding that such a policy would not actually require a home rule petition and could therefore be implemented right away.

Over the next couple of months, the committee will decide which specific policies to include in a home rule petition. A draft will be presented at a third listening session in the fall. A continued ETU presence at committee meetings will help to ensure that any decisions are made with the welfare of the community in mind.

– Carl Sailor
Rent Study Committee Member

Lessons Learned About
Building Tenant Power

In May, ETU members gathered for a two-part study group on “Our Homes, Our Future: Building the Power to Win Rent Control for Stable Communities,” a 2025 report produced by PolicyLink, Popular Democracy in Action, and the Right to the City Alliance. Written by tenant organizers, researchers, attorneys, and advocates, the report serves as both a defense of rent control and a practical organizing guide for building tenant power.

The report begins by challenging the idea that the housing crisis is simply a matter of supply and demand. It argues that the growing financialization of housing has transformed homes into investment vehicles for landlords, private equity firms, and corporate investors. As housing increasingly serves the needs of financial markets, renters face rising rents, displacement, and housing insecurity. The report notes that there is now no metropolitan area in the US where a full-time minimum wage worker can afford a modest two-bedroom apartment, while roughly half of all renter households spend more than 30% of their income on rent.

The authors make the case that rent control should be understood not merely as price regulation, but as a tool for shifting power. Strong rent control policies can stabilize communities, reduce displacement, improve public health outcomes, support educational attainment, and strengthen local economies by allowing working people to keep more of their income. The report emphasizes that the strongest policies include vacancy control, just-cause eviction protections, broad coverage, and meaningful enforcement mechanisms.



The second half of the report focuses on organizing strategy. It examines common arguments against rent control and provides responses grounded in research and movement experience. The report also highlights something we’re all too familiar with here in Massachusetts: landlord associations and real estate interests spending millions of dollars to influence public opinion, funding research, lobbying elected officials, and fighting tenant protections.

Perhaps the most important lesson from the report is that strong policy and strong organization must go hand-in-hand. Rent control victories are won through organizing, and once won, they must be defended, enforced, and expanded through continued tenant power. Organizers are encouraged to invest in political education, coalition building, and leadership development for the struggle ahead.

For ETU members, the report offers both a roadmap and a reminder: stable, affordable housing is not something that will be handed down from above. It is something tenants must organize to win together.

– Ben Taylor

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.

Ready for Our Close-Up!

At our June 4 meeting, Salazar Media Studio offered to make a short documentary about ETU, and we enthusiastically gave them a thumbs-up. They’re working on preproduction in June, and will film in July and August. The result will be a four- to five-minute film that we can share widely and use on social media.

Our Meetings Are Hybrid!

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

Other Meetings in Easthampton

Over the summer, the City Council meets only once a month. Upcoming meetings will be on July 15 and August 5 at 6 pm.

We intend to maintain a regular presence at meetings and use the public speak segment to voice our concerns. We’re working on a strategic plan to make specific requests that will help to advance our cause and benefit tenants.

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

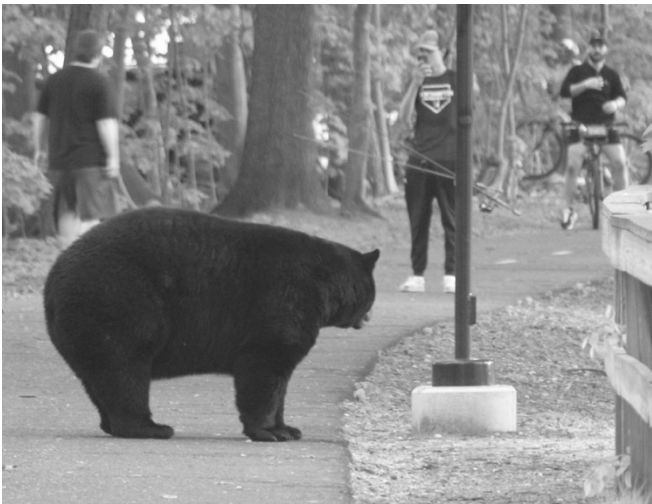
Get Involved to Make a Difference

A great way to learn about how the city government functions and contribute to making changes is to join a committee. Currently there are openings on the Affordable and Fair Housing Partnership, the Board of Health, the Commission on Disability, the Public Library Association, the Veterans Council, and several others.

Find out more at easthamptonma.gov, on the “Vacancies, Applications, Appointment Process” page.

“Effective tenant organizing requires thinking strategically about how to solve a problem. It takes time and information to develop an initial plan of action or strategy. Strategies or campaigns also evolve, change, and are refined over time.”

MassLegalHelp.org



Some big black bears have been seen lumbering around town. This one took a stroll on the bike path.

“Home is where children find safety and security, where we find our identities, where citizenship starts. It usually starts with believing you’re part of a community, and that is essential to having a stable home.”
– Matthew Desmond (author of *Evicted: Poverty and Profit in the American City*)