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Talking Co-ops

The Risks In Leasing The Land

By ANDREE BROOKS

BUYERS shopping for cooperative apartments often are surprised to learn that some co-op corporations own their buildings, but not the land on which they stand.

In some cases, these landless co-ops are conversions of rental buildings that had been erected on leased land. When the co-op was set up, the land owner was not willing to sell.

In other cases, the sponsor owned the land and the building, but was unwilling to give up the land at the time of conversion, believing it to be an investment worth retaining. This happened a year ago when the Rudin family, which owns many Manhattan properties, converted a 344-unit rental apartment house at 2 Fifth Avenue into a co-op. "New York land is increasingly hard to come by," explained Eric Rudin, vice president of Rudin Management.

There are about 50 such leasehold co-ops around Manhattan, brokers say, and one or two new ones are created each year. The majority are prewar buildings on the East Side and in Greenwich Village. The land leases run for terms of 30 to 90 years.

This raises a host of concerns for anyone considering one of these apartments, as an outsider buying a resale unit or as a tenant buying into a conversion.

For example, will the value remain as strong as in a freehold co-op that owns the land, or does the value sag as the term of the

Belnord Tenants Turning to Preservation

By RICHARD D. LYONS

RESIDENTS of the Belnord, the huge landmark apartment house on Manhattan's Upper West Side, have taken a cue from conservationists and set up a fund to help rehabilitate their building.

Contributions are to come from rent roll-backs and refunds ordered by the state's Division of Housing and Community Renewal for two-thirds of the apartments in the building at 201-225 West 86th Street. The action is the latest chapter in what may be the longest and most bitter landlord-tenant battle in the city — dating back 25 years.

Lillian Seril, the Belnord's owner, is suing more than 100 of the building's 220 tenants on a series of charges, including: failure to pay rent increases, illegal residency and vandalism. She is seeking to evict about 50 of them. In the last eight years the tenants' association has spent \$350,000 in attorneys fees because of its legal skirmishes with Mrs. Seril.

The tenants view the fund, the Belnord Landmark Conservancy, as an expression of their commitment to the building. Mrs. Seril, however, believes their action is another attempt to gain control of the property.

"We are not looking for lower rents," said Dr. Thomas Vitullo-Martin, the co-chairman of the Belnord Tenants Association. "We're looking for a better building."

Tenants say they hope the fund — a concept derived from the Central Park Conservancy — will persuade Mrs. Seril to make improvements, the costs of which would be shared.

The Belnord is a 12-story Italian Renaissance structure that covers the full block bounded by Broadway, 86th and 87th Streets and Amsterdam Avenue. It has an enormous interior courtyard and two huge entrances. When the Belnord opened in 1908 it was billed as the world's largest apartment house. Its ornate style, high ceilings and large apartments have been a magnet for artists, writers, actors and academics, including the late actor Zero Mostel, Isaac Bashevis Singer, the Nobel Prize-winning author, and Art D'Lugoff, the impresario.

Yet for all its romance and beauty, the building has been the focus of a seemingly

Sumner M. Rosen, Columbia professor of sociology, at the Belnord, the block-square apartment building at 201-225 West 86th Street, where he has lived for 12 years.

