

City Council threatens to sue Beach Flats landlord over rent

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Nearly a month after City Attorney John Barisone sent a letter to a Beach Flats landlord demanding he roll back rents on his apartments, the City Council says it will sue the landlord if he doesn't comply.

Barisone sent a letter to Victor Rodriguez Dec. 29, informing him the

**SANTA
CRUZ**

two rent increases he levied on the apartments at 204 Riverside Ave. broke a city law pro-

hibiting rent increases on apartments that have outstanding health and safety violations. Tuesday, Barisone reported to the council he had not heard back from Rodriguez whether he intended to lower rents and return money to tenants.

Rodriguez, who bought the apartment complex from Nick Zurich in 1999, has raised the rents twice, making studios \$995 per month, one-bedroom apartments \$1,195 and two-bedroom apartments \$1,350.

Rodriguez inherited one set of code

violations from the Zurichs and was cited for further violations in spring of 1999. Last week, Chief Building Official Dick Stubendorff sent Rodriguez a 26-page letter detailing new code violations and noted each of the 32 units in the complex have some kind of code violation. The violations include no heat, no hot water, leaking plumbing, broken or stuck windows and stagnant water in and around the complex. Stubendorff said Rodriguez has contacted him and he intends to fix the problems.

There are signs some problems are being fixed. But some tenants, like those who appeared at Tuesday's council meeting, said they were afraid management was retaliating against them. Tenant Jema Cruz, who's been vocal in her disapproval of rent increases and living conditions, said she returned home from work Monday and found all of her property out in the courtyard in front of her apartment. She said she told management she wouldn't be able to move apartments for them to fix hers for 48 hours.

"Now people are afraid to complain about problems because they're afraid what happened to me will happen to them," she said in Spanish.

Councilman Mark Primack said he supports the impending suit because "this is not going to go away on its own," but said he worries about the tenants' well-being.

"Despite the best efforts of government and concerned people, when war is waged against slumlords, tenants suffer," he said. "This will not be solved on its own, so I support the suit. But this kind of retaliation is clearly painful."

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