

IF THE STATE KILLS THE VACANCY BONUS, A NEW ONE COULD RESPAWN



Rent Guidelines Board hasn't applied a vacancy increase since the 1990s

By KATHRYN BRENZEL

Even if Albany eliminates vacancy bonuses for rent-regulated units, the city's Rent Guidelines Board can simply implement a new one, members said Thursday.

During a day-long hearing, the board discussed what actions its members could take if the state eliminates a 5 to 20 percent-plus rent bump landlords can apply when a rent-stabilized unit is vacated. The RGB hasn't decided to apply a vacancy increase since the late 1990s, when the state's vacancy bonus was implemented.

Scott Walsh, an owner's representative board member and a Forest City alum, indicated that he plans to propose a vacancy increase for the board to potentially vote on in June, though he wouldn't provide details on any percentages he's considering.

During a break in Thursday's hearing, board member Patti Stone, an attorney with Rosenberg & Estis, indicated that she also hasn't determined what kind of percentage she would propose.

Ahead of the RGB's final vote, board members can submit their own proposals, which need a total of five votes to be approved. Typically, there are between six or seven proposals.



Executive Director Andrew McLaughlin noted Albany is expected to decide on the vacancy bonus issue and other proposed changes before the board's final vote on potential rent increases. A vacancy rent increase could be introduced into whatever proposal is voted on during the board's final vote, even if it's not presented in the initial May vote, McLaughlin said.

"It would have to be a reasonable number that wouldn't be challenged," he said.

Vacancy bonuses, along with vacancy decontrol, Major Capital Improvements and Individual Apartment Improvements, are among the programs potentially on the chopping block this legislative session. The New York State Assembly is expected to host the first of two hearings on those proposals on May 2. **TRD**