

The Dallas Morning News

West Dallas tenants vent fears of eviction

Written by: [Dianne Solis](#) October 9, 2016

Enriqueta Sanchez came to a community meeting Saturday in rapidly gentrifying West Dallas armed with documents, including a notice to vacate her family's rental house.



Ashley Landis/ Staff Photographer

City, school and community leaders told her and more than 200 others they'd work "day and night" to help the 305 tenants on a list for possible evictions by HMK Ltd., a landlord of inexpensive housing. The disruptions caused by the potential mass evictions, mostly in West Dallas, have taken many tenants by surprise.

"We are really desperate," said Sanchez, who pays \$400 a month for a frame house on a hilly street behind the Belmont Hotel.

Inside the gym at the Anita Martinez Recreation Center, Raul Reyes, a leader in the Los Altos neighborhood association, started the meeting by telling people in Spanish and English not to panic. But panic was obvious among those in the gray bleachers.

One frustrated woman, Gabriela Perez, nearly shouted at city officials who were at the microphone: "What is the solution?" she said. "Are you going to get to that point or not?"



HMK rental properties on Nomas Street in West Dallas. Louis DeLuca/Staff Photographer

Perez moved from a HMK rental house into another HMK property. Her old rental house was quickly torn down. Then, a month later, she received a notice to vacate her new place -- after she'd paid to make repairs to the rental property, she said.

Another woman said she sank \$5,000 into roof repairs, thinking she might be able to purchase her rental home.

Meanwhile, at the microphone in the blue-hued gym, Dallas Mayor Pro Tem Monica Alonzo told the crowd that she met with city staff "the moment" she heard about HMK's eviction plans.

Two weeks ago, Khraish H. Khraish, a co-owner of HMK, notified city officials by letter that the company planned to move out tenants paying month-to-month, a move affecting 305 properties. Once a tenant leaves, HMK will either "immediately demolish the rental unit or no longer use the unit for residential purposes," the letter said.

Phone calls Friday and Saturday seeking comment from HMK were not returned.

Last month, a lawsuit filed by two West Dallas tenants accused HMK of being “the most prolific slumlords in Dallas County, who operate a business which preys on the most vulnerable.”

In a telephone interview then with *The Dallas Morning News*, Khraish called the allegations groundless.

“We do not prey on the most vulnerable,” he said.

Most of the planned evictions are in the 75212 ZIP code in West Dallas. It’s a once-neglected jumble of neighborhoods mixed with factories, cement plants, and metal shops.

Established neighborhoods like La Bajada near the Margaret Hunt Hill Bridge and the Trinity Groves restaurant hub have median household incomes of about \$40,000, according to the Census Bureau. But that median dives to as low as \$18,000 in areas farther west.

Many of HMK’s tenants have children, and parents say they’re worried about pulling their kids out of West Dallas schools.

Lisa Miramontes, principal of the area’s [Lorenzo De Zavala Elementary School](#), pledged “the total support” of the Dallas school district. She said if families are forced to move away, transportation will be provided so children can remain in schools where they’re now enrolled..

The only speaker greeted with even light applause was Melissa Miles, an assistant city attorney. Sprinkling Spanish into her remarks, she explained that eviction is a multistep process, one that the courts have a say in.

“It is not enough to tell you to leave,” she said. “Don’t panic.” Until the legal process runs its course, “no one can put you out,” she said.

Some residents wanted to know if the city’s lawyers would defend them. Miles said the city doesn’t represent individuals.

The Dallas City Council has scheduled a closed-door briefing Tuesday on legal issues surrounding HMK..

The city is separately involved in litigation with another landlord, Dennis Topletz, who is accused of renting 190 properties riddled with code violations to low-income tenants. Topletz has said the city’s legal action is part of an effort to turn over his southern Dallas properties to developers for gentrification.



Sign outside HMK's offices.
G.J. McCarthy/Staff Photographer



Community members listen to announcements during community meeting regarding evictions in West Dallas at Anita Martinez Recreation Center on Oct. 8, 2016. Ting Shen/Staff Photographer

[Michael Hindman](#), a private attorney representing individual Topletz tenants in the ongoing suit, also represents a few HMK tenants. HMK has a portfolio of about 450 low-income rentals, more than twice the number leased by Topletz.

Hindman was at Saturday's meeting, and Miles, the city attorney, pointed him out to the crowd. As the meeting ended, a cluster of renters huddled around him, showing him documents and telling him they'd like to stay in their rental homes or even buy them.

Hindman said he'd like to seek a temporary restraining order against HMK to slow down the planned evictions.

Staff writer Julieta Chiquillo contributed to this report.