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Residents blast Parkmerced

Deteriorating conditions cited by tenants

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City officials have placed themselves smack-dab in the middle of a squabble between the tenants and landlord of the city's largest apartment complex over maintenance and safety issues and the possibility of a rent hike that some tenants say may force them onto the streets.

In a Board of Supervisors Finance and Labor Committee meeting last week, tenants of Parkmerced Apartments, located on 19th Avenue across from San Francisco State University, complained to the supervisors that their landlord — the Denver-based Carmel Companies — has let the complex deteriorate since it bought the property from notorious hotel mogul Leona Helmsley in July 1999.

"The condition of the property has deteriorated so much in the last year that most of us are now embarrassed to say we live there," said Linda Dolan, president of the Parkmerced Residents Organization. "While in most cases it would suffice to discuss our dissatisfaction with the management, we feel that evidence indicates management will say one thing and then do whatever they were planning to do anyway."

Board of Supervisors president Tom Ammiano, who sponsored the hearing, acknowledged



PHOTO: RORY McNAMARA

Residents say Parkmerced Apartments, a 143-acre complex near 19th Avenue that is owned by a Denver-based company, has fallen into disrepair over the last year.

that the city had no authority over the actions taken by Carmel Companies at Parkmerced, but he said he hoped the hearing would open up the lines of communication between the tenants and the landlord.

"Appalled" by conditions

Parkmerced residents told the committee that there are several deep trenches throughout the complex, the laundry

room is in disrepair, mold and mildew complaints are going unanswered, and many apartments are in need of a paint job.

"I am appalled and alarmed at the tactics being practiced by [Carmel Companies]," said Vicki Mack, who has lived in Parkmerced for 25 years. "This maintenance scheme has left Parkmerced looking like a war zone. One-third of the property has open trenches at any given

time. Carmel Companies could not do a better job of turning Parkmerced, inside and out, into a housing project if it tried."

Paulette Borroughs, general manager of Parkmerced Apartments, said the 146-acre apartment complex has had its fair share of problems, including 53 water pipe breaks in the

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last 17 months, which is why there have been so many trenches around the complex.

"In order to improve something, something has to look bad for a period of time," said Borroughs.

Anthony Simmons, vice-president of the Parkmerced Apartment Organization, said not only is the complex beginning to look bad, it's beginning to feel unsafe. He said there has been a rash of car thefts and robberies in and around the complex.

"Safety has decreased," said Simmons. "A lot of residents are concerned about this."

But, Borroughs said that Carmel Companies has actually increased the security patrol around the complex from 550 hours a month to 672 hours.

Payments for upgrades

Residents also spoke of the possible addition of a fitness center and game room to the complex, which they would be forced to foot the bill for, even though they were never asked if they wanted such amenities, they said.

"We are expected to pay for supposed upgrades to the property that we have no need or no interest in," said Dolan. "The current tenants have no interest in subsidizing this new construction for the benefit of the landlord."

However, Borroughs said that no charges would be levied on residents for the addition of the fitness center and game room. However, she said, the company does want to pass the costs of complex maintenance on to the tenants and intend to file for permission to do so with the city's Rent Board by the end of the month.

She said that if the rent hike were approved the Rent Board would determine the amount, but Parkmerced would set up a hardship program designed to help residents who cannot pay the increased rent.

Borroughs also mentioned that negotiations have improved with the Montessori Children's Center, which the Carmel Companies last May issued an eviction notice to, giving it until the end of June to vacate the property where it has been operating for 24 years. Carmel later recanted that demand and has since been in talks with Montessori representatives.

Carmel Companies is currently in discussions with Montessori on constructing a new building on the Parkmerced site. Carmel representatives say new plans for the childcare center could be unveiled as soon as January.