



advertisement

Home Equity
Line of Credit**6.23%***
APR

<http://www.baltimoresun.com/business/realestate/bal-md.condo16jan16,1,5749082.story?coll=bal-realestate-headlines-1>

Condo boom spells end for apartment complex

Loss of Balto. County community mourned

By Laura Barnhardt
sun reporter

January 16, 2006

Emily Brewster says living in the Rodgers Forge Apartments has been a lot like living on Sesame Street.

Children play on the lawns outside the brick buildings and attend good public schools. A mix of senior citizens, doctoral students and young couples are friendly with each other, and the property is known for being clean and feeling safe.

It's been easy, Brewster says, for tenants to feel like they're on the set of a wholesome PBS program. On top of all that, rents are as low as \$595 a month.

But many who live in the Towson apartment complex are now mourning what they see as the imminent loss of this storybook life. The World War II-era apartments will be converted into condominiums this year, and most of the current residents don't expect to be around after the change.

"It's a sad time," said Brewster, who lived in the Rodgers Forge Apartments for six years, beginning when she got married and through the births of two children. She reluctantly moved last month, when she found a rental house nearby, because she knew that her family would soon have to leave the apartment complex.

"I just loved it there," she said. "All the kids played together. People from the townhouses walked their dogs there."

Victoria Sheridan, an apartment resident who is president of the Rodgers Forge Tenants Association, said the idea of such a drastic change has brought "a tremendous amount of anxiety" to tenants.

"I've had senior citizens calling me crying," she said. "People are devastated."

Work is scheduled to begin within three weeks to turn the one-, two- and three-bedroom rental units into

condominiums with newly installed air conditioning, washers and dryers, and remodeled kitchen and baths, said Doug Lashley, senior management director at Triton-Rodgers Forge LLC, the project's developer. Lashley said the company hopes to begin selling condos in about a month, and tenants will be given the opportunity to buy their units.

Prices will start in the low \$200,000s, according to the condominium's Web site and signs in the complex.

The apartment complex - 508 units in all - was bought for \$55 million, according to Lashley. He said the company will spend another \$25 million renovating the 119 buildings.

"This is a complete rehab," he said. "It's a beautiful piece of property, but it cried out for updating."

Triton's plans come as a relief to some Towson residents who had been concerned that the developer would tear down the existing two-story buildings to erect a high-rise.

"I think many people in surrounding communities are happy that the renovation is under way," said Baltimore County Councilman Vincent J. Gardina, a Perry Hall-Towson Democrat.

Increased demand

Real estate agent Margaret Rome said she's seen the demand for condominiums increase in the past few years. She says they appeal to older residents looking to rid themselves of larger homes and to younger professionals who often travel.

Lashley said his company is also planning to buy the Excalibur at Avalon apartments in Pikesville and convert them into condominiums.

Some residents and officials are concerned about the loss of affordable housing in Towson, especially since the Dulaney Valley Apartments complex is also being converted into condominiums. Gardina said he has introduced legislation that would allow a developer of housing for seniors with low to moderate incomes to build at a higher density than zoning would normally allow.

Units at the Rodgers Forge Apartments rent for \$595 to \$990 a month.

Maureen Martindale, a tenant at Rodgers Forge Apartments since 1997, plans to buy her unit. "I think that tenants who assume that a mortgage payment will be more than what they're currently paying in rent may be a bit short-sighted," she said.

Tenant complaints

Still, hundreds of tenants, including the elderly and disabled, likely will be uprooted from their homes.

Some tenants complain that information about plans was hard to come by after word surfaced in May that the complex was for sale. Some are unhappy about recent rent increases and notices about planned visits by property managers to talk with residents about their moving plans. Some tenants felt they would be pressured to leave sooner than they have to, Sheridan said.

When Triton converted an apartment complex in [Annapolis](#) into condominiums, tenants there objected to how the company handled notices to residents. In that case, residents were told they needed to move before they were required to leave. Sheridan said the situation in [Annapolis](#) added to Rodgers Forge Apartments tenants' apprehension.

"I believe in free enterprise," said Peg Shelby, a 63-year-old bank manager who has lived at the Rodgers Forge complex for a decade. But, she added, "It just makes me angry the way this was done."

Lashley said the company has offered financial incentives to some people to move sooner, and in some cases have paid for services to help them pack. State law on apartments being turned into condominiums requires developers to provide financial assistance for tenants' moving costs. That aid can be as much as \$750.

"We are human beings. We are going above and beyond what the state requires," Lashley said. "We're trying to be responsive to questions and concerns."

Sheridan, the tenant association president, said she worries that non-English-speaking residents and elderly tenants might not understand their rights, which, in some cases, could allow a tenant to stay at the complex for as long as three years.

Sheridan, a mother of three whose husband is completing his residency at Johns Hopkins Hospital, said her family will have to move out of their three-bedroom apartment by the end of June. She has helped arrange for tenants to meet this month with the Baltimore County Legal Aid Bureau.

Susan Tannenbaum, a staff attorney with the bureau, said lease-termination notices are often difficult to understand.

"For the average lay person, the notice is like a book and it's very technical," she said. "For the elderly, in particular, it can be terrifying."

.....
laura.barnhardt@baltsun.com
.....

Copyright © 2006, *The Baltimore Sun* / *Get Sun home delivery*

> [Get news on your mobile device at www.baltimoresun.com](http://www.baltimoresun.com)