



After life in the high-rises, relocation falls short for some



By JOHANA VAZQUEZ
Day Staff Writer

New London

WHEN NAKIESHA MOORE was born on May 1, 1988, the home address on her birth certificate said 48 Crystal Ave., the address for the A Building at the Thames River Apartments.

Her family moved away when she was 2.

On a sunny October day in 2011, Moore found herself moving to the same address and the same building. She was 23 years old with her 3-year-old son in her arms.

Fast forward seven years, and Moore would be one of the last people to leave the apartment complex

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before it closed permanently.

The apartments on Crystal Avenue, underfunded and mismanaged for decades, were demolished this past spring, five years after the City of New London received approval for their evacuation and demolition from the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development.

HUD gave 114 families Tenant Protection Vouchers as part of the Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher Program. The vouchers, what some referred to as “golden tickets,”

allowed them to live anywhere in the U.S. and pay 30% of their monthly adjusted income toward rent.

This past spring, as The Day began a yearlong investigation into housing in southeastern Connecticut, we researched where the families went after leaving the federally subsidized Thames River Apartments and whether they still had vouchers.

Of the 114 families given vouchers, 105 households initially leased homes in New London County and 93 still have a voucher.

Of the 105 households that initially leased in New London County, 98 households remain in the county

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The bathroom sink sits in the dining room of Nakiesha Moore's apartment on Shaw Street in New London. SARAH GORDON/THE DAY

FLOATING TO THE BEACH



SARAH GORDON/THE DAY

Annabel Gujarro-Sines, 8, leads the way as her brother Daniel, 9, and mother Erica Sines, walk along Ocean Avenue in New London to Ocean Beach Park on Thursday. Sines said they live in the neighborhood and walk to the beach as often as possible. “I got excited about the cooler weather last week,” she said, “but we really can’t complain about more hot walk to the beach summer days.”

Trump affidavit will be made public

But Mar-a-Lago search document will be heavily redacted

By ERIC TUCKER
Associated Press

Washington — A judge ordered the Justice Department on Thursday to make public a redacted version of the affidavit it relied on when federal agents searched the Florida estate of former President Donald Trump to look for classified documents.

The directive from U.S. Magistrate Judge Bruce Reinhart came hours after federal law enforcement officials submitted under seal the portions of the affidavit that they want to keep secret as their investigation moves forward. The judge set a deadline of noon today for a redacted, or blacked-out, version of the document.

SEE REDACTIONS PAGE A3

Stefanowski says Connecticut is paying ‘corruption tax’

In New London, he cites State Pier cost overruns, criminal investigations

By ERICA MOSER
Day Staff Writer

New London — Against the auditory backdrop of pile drivers at State Pier and next to a visual with bars labeled “\$93M” and “over \$242M,” Republican gubernatorial candidate Bob Stefanowski on Thursday slammed Gov. Ned Lamont for lack of transparency and cost overruns on the offshore wind redevelopment project at State Pier.

Stefanowski said one tax he hasn’t discussed that “you’re going to hear a lot about” between now and November is the “corruption tax.” In addition to the State Pier project, he pointed to the FBI investigating school construction grants, misuse of COVID-19 relief funds in West Haven, and the state’s past COVID-19 testing contract with Sema4, which has financial backing from the health care venture capital firm founded by the governor’s wife, Annie Lamont.

Stefanowski said the biggest example of the “corruption tax” is the Connecticut Port Authority, which is overseeing the State Pier project. Day

columnist David Collins revealed last week that a federal grand jury has subpoenaed six years of port authority records as part of an investigation into the quasi-public agency.

Stefanowski criticized the project cost increasing from \$93 million to more than \$242 million. (The latest estimate is actually \$255 million.)

“Anybody want to guess who picks up that overrun? You think it’s Ever-source? Of course not,” he said. “You think it’s Ørsted? Of course not. You know who picks it up? You.”

He called this “disgusting,” saying this money could’ve gone toward ed-

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Republican gubernatorial candidate Bob Stefanowski and his running mate Laura Devlin, hold a news conference Thursday in New London.

SEAN D. ELLIOT/THE DAY

Sky riders



CARLOS GONZALEZ/STAR TRIBUNE VIA AP

Passengers ride the Skyride on Thursday at The Minnesota State Fair in Falcon Heights, Minn.

WEATHER

Today, partly sunny and humid. High 82. Saturday, more of the same. High 82. A6

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CONNECTICUT BY THE NUMBERS

948,232 (3,985)

Confirmed cases of COVID-19

11,195 (15)

Cases that have resulted in death

352 (23)

Number of patients hospitalized

65,671 (368)

New London County cases

Numbers in parentheses show 7-day change

RHODE ISLAND MAYOR PROPOSES \$10M REPAIRATIONS SPENDING PLAN

Providence’s mayor proposed spending \$10 million in federal coronavirus pandemic aid on financial literacy and homeownership, workforce training, small business development and other programs recently recommended by the city’s reparations commission.

Mayor Jorge Elorza’s spending plan, released Thursday, also calls for using \$250,000 in federal money to launch a legal defense fund for residents facing eviction, \$400,000 dedicated to directly support Black and Native American residents displaced and negatively impacted by urban renewal and \$500,000 to expand the guaranteed income program for low income residents that launched last summer, among other initiatives.

The Democratic mayor also signed an executive order formally apologizing on behalf of Rhode Island’s capital city for its role in slavery, urban renewal and other racist and discriminatory practices. The spending proposal now goes to the city council for approval.

— Associated Press

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Next in the Series

Saturday

■ The high-rises are gone, but the need for affordable housing remains

Sunday

■ Thames River residents gather for annual reunion
■ Rejected plans to replace Thames River Apartments

Go to www.theday.com/housinglab for additional articles, photographs and podcasts.

A new apartment building is under construction on Howard Street behind Nakiesha Moore's Shaw Street apartment in New London.

SARAH GORDON/THE DAY



Housing vouchers considered 'golden ticket'

FROM A1

while seven households have relocated outside of it, according to the data from Thames Valley Council for Community Action.

Documents obtained from the New London Housing Authority through the Freedom of Information Act indicate three families initially moved to North Carolina, Georgia and Alabama. It is unclear whether the residents who moved out of the county and state still have housing vouchers.

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Moving On

The former residents told us they were at first excited about the prospect of moving into a new home, but their expectations fell short and they missed the community that was dispersed from the Thames River Apartments. Their experiences do not reflect the experiences of all who left.

"At the beginning everything was fun," said Alba Martinez, now of Taftville, about moving out of Crystal Avenue. "But after thinking about it, it's crazy, you start missing things that now you don't have."

She misses the community and the city she grew accustomed to living in.

New landlords

The moment former residents of the Thames River Apartments received vouchers from HUD, the New London Housing Authority was no longer their landlord. Once they leased an apartment with their voucher, they had private landlords and an annual visit from an inspector to assure the apartment met HUD's quality and safety standards.

The city's housing authority did not manage the vouchers given to the former Thames River Apartments residents, having surrendered the responsibility of administering its vouchers in 2013, according to the state Department of Housing. The department, through its agent, John D'Amelia and Associates, and the Glendower Group, hired by the authority, issued vouchers to residents starting in 2017.

The state continues to oversee the funding for the vouchers, while the case management of voucher holders is split between D'Amelia and its subcontractor, the Thames Valley Council for Community Action, or TVCCA.

The voucher program is designed to allow families to move without the loss of housing assistance, but recipients are not guaranteed vouchers for life. Vouchers can be lost for various reasons



Nakiesha Moore's dog, Ny'la, sleeps on the floor of the living room of her three-bedroom apartment on Shaw Street in New London. The living room doubles as storage space in the apartment, which she says is too small.

SARAH GORDON/THE DAY

that include criminal activity, domestic abuse and being evicted by the landlord.

The state Department of Housing said there is no way to distinguish the former Thames River Apartment residents from the current general pool of voucher holders in the state, nor can it disclose any information about their whereabouts.

Fresh start

It was awkward, Moore admits, when she moved into the Thames River Apartments as a young mother. She said she grew up with half the people there, knowing them through school and family ties.

This was Moore's first time on her own and she was struggling to settle in. For the first few months, she would get out of work and spend the rest of the day at her grandmother's house until nighttime.

Moore eventually got used to living there again, calling herself a homebody. She liked her apartment, or her "bubble," at Thames River. But it was hard providing for her son on her own.

During this time, she worked at a car dealership, then a hotel, and never paid more than \$200 in rent for a two-bed apartment, including water, heat and cable. Electricity was separate, but Moore was conscious about saving energy. When her son started day care at TVCCA, she paid \$125 monthly.

In 2014, Moore landed a job at Wendy's earning minimum wage, which was then about \$8 an hour. The housing authority then calculated how much she would make every month with the new job. Working more hours, her rent

increased about \$30-\$40.

Around the same time, Moore started dating someone who was good to her and her son and who balanced her out and calmed her. He moved in with her.

"He was my E.T.," she said about their strong bond. They got engaged by the end of 2017 and Moore was happy he was around, knowing she could count on him to help.

That year, Moore's grandmother had issues with her landlord.

"I have nowhere to go," Moore recalls her grandmother saying in a phone call. They moved her into their two-bedroom apartment on Crystal Avenue. Since her grandmother has congestive heart failure and needs a walker to move, they made the living room a makeshift bedroom so she would have easy access to the bathroom.

When Moore received a voucher, a part of her was excited to get a bigger apartment, one suitable for her growing household. She remembers going for an assessment in 2018, and being asked if they were to rebuild the apartments, would she want to come back or not?

"I did tell them no, I wasn't coming back," Moore said. "... I wanted something bigger and better, hoping to get it with a voucher."

'A rushed job'

The vast majority of families had already left the complex by June 2018, and Moore still had no apartment.

Moore did not intend to be one of the last remaining families at the apartments. Her family had plans to leave New London and move elsewhere in the county, but it was hard

to find an available three-bedroom apartment that was handicap-accessible, even with help from the assisting agencies.

"It was a rushed job," Moore said about the whole operation. Without an extension, the vouchers were good for 90 days after residents received them. The first batch of vouchers was issued on Dec. 28, 2017. Moore received her voucher in June, so the clock was ticking. That same month, Moore learned she was expecting her second child, and her fiancé was elated.

Then, on June 22, 2018, Moore's fiancé died of a heart attack. She did not want to talk about that painful memory during an interview in May, especially as the four-year anniversary of his death neared.

Eight days after his death, an electrical fire started in B building, the building next door to hers. The housing authority, concerned the A building would also have an electrical fire, told Moore she and her household would be moved into a hotel room.

Pregnant and grieving, Moore had to figure out how to move on now that her "life support" was gone.

"It was a lot of stress," Moore said. "I just lost a big part of me, so how was I going to get everything back on track on top of being pregnant and getting no help from no one?"

Moore, her grandmother and son spent nearly two months at a hotel. With the absence of her fiancé, Moore changed her mind about leaving New London. She had some stability here. Rejected twice by landlords, Moore became aggravated and stressed.

The family was finally able to secure a three-bedroom

apartment in August 2018 on Shaw Street in the city, where she still lives today.

It's not exactly what she expected. The home is "discombobulated," with the bathroom sink outside of the bathroom, a few feet from her sectioned-off kitchen sink. She has zero counter space in her kitchen and less storage than she had at the two-bedroom apartment on Crystal Avenue.

Within two years of working at Wendy's, Moore was promoted to manager. Gradually, her pay has increased to about \$15 an hour. She now pays \$600, utilities not included, for an apartment that is \$1,500 at market rate, not handicap-accessible and "not even worth it," she said.

Moore's income, together with her grandmother's Social Security check, pays for expenses apart from rent that include water, electricity, gas for her car and insurance. Food is less of a problem because she has food stamps.

"It's like they expect you to make \$4,000 a month just to live comfortably," she said.

Moore is on her third landlord at the multi-family home on Shaw Street, which has been sold three times in the less than five years she's resided there.

Far from home

On South 2nd Avenue in the Taftville section of Norwich there is a row of white two-story townhouses. Alba Martinez has lived in one of them with her four children since March 2022.

The home is blocks away from their first apartment they rented after leaving the Thames River Apartments in early 2018. She recalls being excited, but not so eager to

move far from home.

Martinez didn't want to go to Taftville, but that was the first five-bedroom apartment she could find for herself and her four children. HUD has housing standards that determine the size of a unit a family is eligible for based on their size and composition. She has sought to return to New London but has not found an apartment there that can accommodate her family.

Ten minutes from the bustle of downtown Norwich, Taftville is quiet. Martinez is not used to that quiet, nor does she like it. She has always lived around friends and had kids playing around. Sisters, brothers, nieces, nephews lived at the Thames River Apartments, as did her parents during the last three years.

Being so close to downtown New London back then, Martinez and her daughter Rose-line Melendez, 15, remember walking to City Pier for Sailfest every summer, Riverside Park or walking anywhere.

Martinez, who doesn't drive, said she and her kids enjoyed walks to appointments. They would also walk to the Universal Store at Hodges Square for quick groceries or take a \$15 taxi or the bus to Walmart. Not yet adjusted to the bus transit route in Taftville, Martinez has to Uber to work and catch a ride with her husband to the nearest grocery store outside of Taftville.

Martinez said she and her husband are currently living separately. She works 25 hours a week as a patient care assistant to her mother — who also lived at Thames River Apartments and received a voucher — and is paid \$17.25 an hour.

She pays \$316 a month, utilities not included, for her five-bed apartment that is worth \$2,195 in market value.

Martinez lived at the apartments for 17 years and raised all four of her children there. She began living there about three years after she arrived to the mainland from Puerto Rico in 1995. She said they all cried when they saw the Thames River Apartments being demolished.

Having lived in New London her whole life, Martinez's daughter, young Melendez said she did not want to move.

Martinez said the move has been hard for her children, especially as the COVID-19 pandemic made it hard to socialize in the new area. She said one of her children has struggled to adjust and has been expelled from school three times since moving.

"We never experienced anxiety or depression before leaving," Martinez said. "You have no one to talk to." jvazquez@theday.com