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June 15, 2013 / Real Estate / Opinion / Editorial

Give Queens a Place at the Table

TimesLedger Newspapers

Queens and the other outerboroughs are being pushed to the back of the room again as another Manhattan-centric group sets the agenda. This time it's the city Rent Guidelines Board, which recently proposed steep rent hikes for stabilized apartments around the city.

The board decided to hold a single public hearing in Manhattan this week rather than having its officials visit Queens, the Bronx or Brooklyn to hear tenants' views before the final verdict is reached on the increases. In recent years, the nine-member board has rotated the hearing among the boroughs to give the outlanders a voice in the process.

The rent board has cited low turnout for the outerborough hearings as the reason behind consolidating the proceedings into one day-long session in Lower Manhattan. But the board's first hearing last month, recommending rent hikes of between 3.25 percent and 6.25 percent for one-year leases and between 5 percent to 9.5 percent for two-year leases, drew howls of protest from tenant groups.

The debate over the hefty increases was expected to draw larger numbers of tenants this year from Queens' 144,000 rent-stabilized apartments, but getting to a Manhattan hearing posed a problem for many job holders.

And it should be noted that Queens has the second highest median rent in the city, with the rate for rent-stabilized apartments at \$1,230 a month vs. \$1,295 for Manhattan, according to the 2011 stats from the Furman Center for Real Estate and Public Policy.

Queens deserves to have a place at the table as do the Bronx and Brooklyn, even if the Rent Guidelines Board visits these boroughs just every two or three years. Asking the people who do not live in Manhattan to cross the rivers to negotiate solely in the heart of Gotham is a little high-handed.

And that may be why Queens residents call the span stretching over the East River the Queensborough Bridge rather than the 59th Street Bridge, as it is known on the other side. But then Ed Koch got into the act and now the bridge is named after a Bronx native who spent much of his adult life in a rent-controlled apartment in Manhattan.

Where is the justice for Queens?

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