

Jonathan Diotalevi  
Lewiston  
LD 1167

Hello members of the Housing and Economic Development Committee. My name is Jonathan Diotalevi. I am a Lewiston resident and live at 51 Howard St. I fully support LD 1167 Resolve, to Create a Pilot Program to Assist Nonprofit Housing Developers in Rehabilitating Existing Aging Housing Stock for First-time Home Buyers.

My wife and I knew we wanted to share a multi-unit building with a friend. After looking for a few months, we ran into two common themes. The cost was way too high, even for our combined incomes. OR we found an almost affordable building, but the cost to make it livable was intimidating and out of reach. We were stuck. Our friend decided to take a look at a condo at 51 Howard. This is when we met Amy and learned all about Healthy Homeworks. We bought into this new type of housing scheme almost immediately.

In our neighborhood in Lewiston the rate of homeownership is only 4%. Changing perspectives, 96% are renters. Renters who have no control over the building they live in and so no stakes and no responsibility. It is obvious when walking around the neighborhood that this is a problem. Clearly neglected buildings owned by distant landlords who's only personal contribution to the community is paying taxes. Paying taxes to the city is important, but if that is the only contribution required it can't be expected that distant landlords will fix up a building out of the goodness of their hearts. We shouldn't expect that, they don't live here and they won't change without a financial incentive.

That is why the Healthy Homeworks housing scheme is a potential game changer for majority renter neighborhoods. A lot of problems with neglect in these old buildings is a lack of accountability and no clear lines for shared responsibility between renter and landlord. For example, if a family lives in a building where the space is already in bad condition and the landlord has no regular contact with the renters. What is the incentive for the renter to take care of or spend money on a unit that they themselves will show no financial benefits. On top of that a renter typically wouldn't have the funds to fix something wrong with the property, and it is not their responsibility.

The landlord side of the equation is similar. Why would they bother fixing up a building if they continue to get rent, renter's complaints can be ignored, and the city does not hold a landlord accountable for their property. The city gets the tax revenue, the landlord gets the rent checks. Nothing changes and the cycle continues.

Ownership is more than a document that says "this is yours", it's the responsibility that comes with it. At 51 Howard St. we OWN our unit and co-own the building and property it is on. We all live here and we care about how our property and neighborhood look. It's ours and so we want to make it our own and better. We want to invest our time into our home, not for future profitability but because it is where we live.

We couldn't afford to live here under a traditional housing model. Even with the combined income of three people, buying a building was out of our grasp. Right here is where Healthy Homeworks fills in this access gap. We three adults want to be responsible for a home, we want to be part of a community and we prefer multi-unit living. Having Healthy Homeworks take on the cost of repairing a building into move-in shape opens up opportunities for more people to become homeowners who have a difficult time making that first hurdle.

Almost one year into living at 51 Howard St has me sure that this program has long term potential to change the lives of many people across the state. Having access to this kind of permanent housing will keep young people in Maine who otherwise would have been priced out. Please support LD1167 .

Thank you,  
Jonathan Diotalevi