

APA Asian Pacific American Legal Resource Center

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Recently Formed Wah Luck House 800 6th Street Tenants' Association Leads First General Member Meeting and Introduces APALRC as Legal Counsel

On January 15, 2009, the Wah Luck House 800 6th Street Tenants' Association held its first general meeting led by the Board who were elected in August 2008. Located at the corner of 6th and H Streets in D.C., the Wah Luck House is home to primarily low-income, limited- or non-English proficient Chinese seniors and families. In 1982, the District government constructed the 153-unit Wah Luck House as home for displaced families after a section of the historic Chinatown neighborhood was razed to make way for the city's first Convention Center. Since that time, ownership of the building has changed hands a number of times, sometimes even without the knowledge of the residents.

In the opening address to more than 70 tenants, Board President Mr. Yam Chum Leung briefly outlined the accomplishments of the Association to date. He highlighted the importance of the Tenants' Association, the first created and led by the tenants themselves. The Tenants' Association was established after several information-sharing meetings between the Wah Luck House tenants and community partners, including the Asian Pacific American Legal Resource Center (APALRC), D.C. Language Access Coalition, Housing Counseling Services (HCS), and the Asian Senior Center, in response to rumors of impending sale of the Wah Luck House that were circulating in spring 2008.



(Above: Wah Luck House 800 6th Street Tenants' Association First General Member Meeting on January 15, 2009)

"The bottom line is that we hope to live at Wah Luck House with peace and stability without being negatively influenced by the reselling of the building, or the change of owners. Because of this, we must have our own organization, our own strength to fight for [our rights]," said Mr. Leung. After assisting with Board elections, APALRC received a technical assistance grant from the National Coalition for Asian and Pacific American Community Development (CAPACD) to continue working with the tenants and connect to similar organizers and groups around the nation.

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Since that time, the Wah Luck House 800 6th Street Tenants' Association, HCS, and APALRC have worked together to ensure that the residents know their rights as tenants in the District of Columbia, and that they have a strong organization within their building. Through bi-weekly meetings held in Mandarin with APALRC staff members Parag Khandhar (staff attorney), Tina Pham (community organizer), Betty Luan (paralegal), supervising attorneys, and HCS Advocate Andrea DeGaetani, the Tenants' Association Board learned about their collective rights as tenants, drafted bylaws and Articles of Incorporation, officially registered with the D.C. government, and opened a business bank account. The Board has recruited more than 60% of the units in the building as members and raised donations for operational costs from members through an organized door-knocking campaign. All of this has happened just in the span of a few months.



(Above: Wah Luck House 800 6th Street Tenants' Association Membership Drive January 15, 2009)

After the meeting, Khandhar said, "We are so proud to work with the Tenants' Association Board, who have shown tremendous leadership and commitment to the tenants since being elected in August. We hope that their leadership will encourage other tenants throughout D.C. and the surrounding areas to step forward and work collectively to address shared issues in their buildings and neighborhoods, and we look forward to working with them as well."

In the months to follow, APALRC will continue its two-pronged approach in working with the Tenants' Association: providing legal advice and counsel on issues involving housing and organizational issues; and helping the directors and members to organize and build the group's power by connecting them with various resources.

If you would like more information on APALRC's Housing and Community Justice Project, please contact Parag Khandhar, Staff Attorney, at parag.khandhar@apalrc.org.