

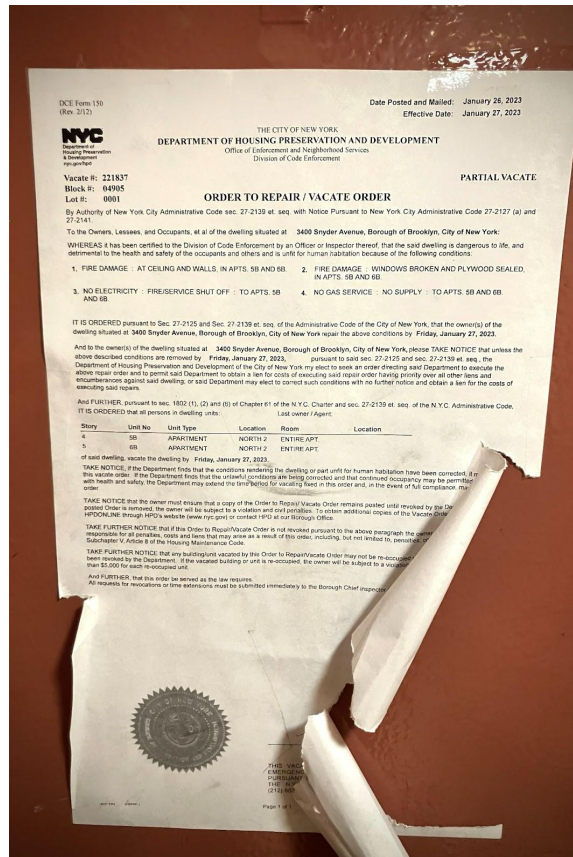
A Fire's Aftermath

By Ezra Nielsen

In January, 2023, a fire ripped through the large multi-unit building at 3400 Snyder Avenue in Brooklyn, [killing](#) a 13-year-old boy and injuring six others. All of the B apartments from the second to the seventh floor were vacated, and residents say that the landlord, Maxx Properties, has kept them locked out until this fall without adequate communication — causing immense legal, financial, and logistical hardship.

Stephanie Clermont and her family — her one-month old baby, her six-year old daughter and her elderly parents — lived in a two-bedroom on the fifth floor for a decade until the fire. After the fire broke out in the unit right above, they were told by the landlord to vacate to a one-bedroom in the same building. They left with nothing but the clothes they were wearing and no information about what would happen next. When Clermont tried to contact the landlord to re-enter her old unit and collect her belongings, which included jewelry and money; she got no response. The Friday after the fire a vacate order was placed on the door of her old apartment. The lock had been changed.

“There was no communication, there was nothing,” said Clermont, 41. “I mean, come on, we’re not garbage,” she added.



The vacate order is still on the door of Apartment 5B.

Clermont and her family is one among many who lived at 3400 Snyder whose homes have still not been repaired, according to Imani Henry, executive director of the tenant advocacy group Equality for Flatbush. Conditions in the occupied units have worsened, he said. The other tenants could not be reached to independently verify this information.

“The bottom line is apartments haven’t been renovated,” he said. “They haven’t done anything to our knowledge to any of them.”

Maxx Properties did not respond to repeated requests for comment.

According to Henry, the problems the Clermont family and the other tenants experienced in the wake of the fire are part of a long-standing set of structural problems in the way Maxx Properties runs the building. He believes the mismanagement and neglect at this property goes back years and includes rodent infestations and hazardous mold. A tenant organization called Residents Against Maxx Properties took to YouTube to make a case similar to the one Henry described.

Since the fire the building’s tenants have filed 83 311 complaints in the building, most commonly reporting heat, hot water and plumbing issues. According to the NYC housing data website Who Owns What, this property in Flatbush has 171 open violations at the Department of Housing Preservation and Development between 2009 and 2024, with a number of recent ones involving the fire safety code.

The Clermonts were not able to gain access to the apartment again until Aug. 15. The only reason they were able to get in then was a court order.

What they found upon re-entry was food strewn on the floor that had attracted mice and a thick layer of mice droppings. The inner walls of the apartment had been ripped out. The Clermonts’ belongings were in disarray, in piles and ruined, as can be seen in a series of [videos](#) Stephanie Clermont posted online.



The exterior of 3400 Snyder Ave.

Some of their belongings were gone. A small safe with \$7,500 in it and Clermont's mother's jewelry were missing.

The Clermont family has since moved to another building. They were able to get into their old apartment again only on Dec. 5 of this year. They are in an ongoing legal dispute with Maxx Properties. Clermont said the company is suing the family for unpaid rent on the damaged apartment, even though, according to her, they only stopped paying rent when they moved out of the building.

The Clermonts' conflict with their landlord, Maxx Properties, and New York City agencies comes at a moment when evictions are [rising](#) in New York City, after the pandemic-era ban was lifted earlier this year. It also comes in the wake of a [bill](#) passed in the City Council in September that makes it easier for tenants displaced by fires to access information and resources and that requires the Department of Housing to inform tenants how vacate orders happen, what their occupancy rights are and what landlords' responsibilities are following a fire.

In addition to the treatment they received after the fire, the residents of the property also felt that safeguards that were supposed to kick in during the fire failed: Clermont said she didn't hear a fire alarm go off. And Henry said the stairwell to the backyard was locked, blocking an egress for residents.

When Henry tried to help the tenants at 3400 Snyder organize he said Maxx Properties called the cops on him. He said his goal is to give them agency.

"The tenants have no voice," he said.