

New tenants union joins with Detroit counterpart for negotiations

BY JAKE ROBBINS
STAFF REPORTER

A movement to organize tenants of a multistate landlord has begun to spread across the country from New Haven, where the first successful tenants union at a Capital Realty Group property formed this summer.

Tenants unions in New Haven and Detroit announced Wednesday that they had secured recognition and new organizing protections in their first joint bargaining session with the New York–based property management firm.

“The reason for the union is to give the tenants a voice. For the first time, as of today, we have the ear of the owner directly,” Ellen Pankey, the vice president of the Park Ridge Tenant Union in New Haven’s West Rock neighborhood, said in a Connecticut Tenants Union press release on Wednesday.

The negotiations mark a significant moment in which tenants across state lines have engaged in collective bargaining with a shared corporate landlord. At both Park Ridge Apartments in New Haven and River Pointe Tower in Detroit, residents have raised what they described as longstanding concerns about maintenance and transparency from management.

Capital Realty Group has not responded to repeated requests for comment on the Park Ridge Tenant Union and renters’ complaints. A News reporter was turned away from the firm’s office in Rockland County, N.Y., this week after a person inside declined to answer questions or open the door.

Capital Realty Group owns more than 14,000 units of federally subsidized housing across 28 states, according to the Wednesday press release from Connecticut Tenants Union.

The company purchased Park Ridge Apartments in 2016 for \$7.6 million and River Pointe Tower in 2022 for \$10.1 million, both with heavy reliance on federally backed loans, the press release said.

Despite those acquisitions, renters and their allies have criticized the company for spending comparatively little on upkeep. At an event this month with the Park Ridge Tenant Union, Sen. Richard Blumenthal of Connecticut said Capital Realty Group has invested less than the typical yearly amount on maintenance per unit.

The Park Ridge Tenant Union formed in early August, as the ninth recognized tenants union in New Haven and the first one at a Capital Realty Group property.



SOPHIA STONE / CONTRIBUTING PHOTOGRAPHER

Capital Realty Group agreed to a follow-up meeting with Park Ridge Tenant Union and a Detroit tenants union.

Two weeks later, tenants at River Pointe Tower in Detroit organized their own union. Capital Realty Group agreed to meet with both unions within days of the Detroit launch.

The company agreed to recognize and meet in good faith with any tenant union across its portfolio,

according to the Connecticut Tenants Union. The company also agreed to respect tenants’ rights to organize, use common spaces and distribute union information without retaliation, the union’s press release said.

According to the press release, Capital Realty Group agreed

to a follow-up meeting, where tenants hope to secure a formal agreement.

The Park Ridge Apartments are located at 10 Hard St.

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City officials hope to turn abandoned plant into new housing

BY JAKE ROBBINS
STAFF REPORTER

New Haven officials hope a planned redevelopment of the abandoned English Station power plant could spur new housing construction in the surrounding area.

Mayor Justin Elicker announced in July that the city plans to convert the former industrial plant into a new public space called Mill River Park. The proposed project would feature walking and biking trails, outdoor pools and playgrounds, according to a news release from the mayor’s office.

Economic Development Administrator Michael Piscitelli said the park would serve as a cornerstone for a new residential neighborhood east of Interstate 91. In a joint interview Tuesday at City Hall, Piscitelli and two members of his staff said ongoing cleanups of abandoned and undeveloped properties adjacent to the former power plant were critical steps toward opening the land for further development.

“Our economic development strategy is built on strong job sectors and rebuilding a public infrastructure that supports a healthy community,” Piscitelli said. “Rebuilding English Station as a public park is the anchor for what we see as a new neighborhood in the Mill River district.”

English Station, vacant since 1992, is one of New Haven’s most visible environmental scars — a contaminated power plant on Ball Island

that has languished in legal disputes for decades.

Fair Haven, the largely low-income and Latino residential neighborhood just east of the site, has experienced persistent environmental issues, with residents facing flooding risks and industrial pollution at higher levels than elsewhere in the city.

The facility, now owned by O&G Industries, has faced reduced federal oversight in the past year. State officials are pushing to hold the former owner United Illuminating accountable for cleanup.

English Station remains contaminated with toxic chemicals and heavy metals. A Connecticut Superior Court ruling in March upheld a \$2 million annual penalty against United Illuminating for failing to remediate the site.

Piscitelli and the members of his staff estimate that once cleanup is underway, the planned Mill River Park could be built in 18 to 24 months. They said residents who attended community and legislative meetings have raised concerns about affordability and the retail options that new developments would support.

Piscitelli said the city is also negotiating with private owners of nearby industrial parcels and contaminated sites.

He said officials are eyeing redevelopment projects at a former petroleum tank farm on River Street

and at the site of a former clock factory in Wooster Square.

“These will be the first two out of the gate,” Piscitelli said, referring to housing developments in the area. “Then you’ll see more as we can open up additional properties for redevelopment.”

The city’s goal, Piscitelli said, is to expand housing supply in Mill River to reduce pressure on other neighborhoods. Without opening new residential districts, he warned, rising demand could encourage developers to tear down existing low-density housing in other parts of the city to build denser housing.

Mill River has long been seen as “the edge” of several neighborhoods — downtown, Fair Haven and Wooster Square — but redevelopment could reposition it as a new center connecting them, Piscitelli said.

But housing development there will take years, as builders seek to secure financing through state agencies, federal programs and private lenders. Piscitelli said four years would be considered a fast turnaround for housing.

Carlos Eyzaguirre, one of Piscitelli’s deputies, stressed the importance of supporting smaller-scale projects in addition to large developments. City officials are particularly interested in housing projects under 30 units.

“We want a market in New Haven where smaller developers — people



LILY BELLE POLING / STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

As New Haven plans to turn the English Station site into a public park, economic development officials said the project could unlock new housing and development in Mill River.

from Connecticut and the neighborhood — actually get a chance to play a role,” Eyzaguirre said. “Those projects can help build a sense of belonging, even if they are harder to fund.”

Malachi Bridges, another official in the economic development administration, said housing construction must be paired with public amenities that improve the quality of life in neighborhoods long dominated by industrial uses.

“We are trying to see ways that we can reconnect communities beyond highway and infrastructure,” Bridges said.

Bridges, who grew up in New Haven, recalled learning to swim at Wilbur Cross High School through the city’s Police Athletic League program, an experience that he said shaped how he views the importance of public amenities.

For him, features like an outdoor pool go hand in hand with building new housing and attracting more families to the city.

English Station is located on the Mill River at 275 Wolcott St.

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New to New Haven? Here are the best parks and trails to explore

BY KINNIA CHEUK
STAFF REPORTER

NFirst years have spent the last week and a half exploring Yale’s campus, and some have hiked on orientation trips. But where can they catch some sun in the Elm City?

Max Webster ENV ’17, the director of the New Haven Parks Department, shared with the News an outdoor bucket list for new Yale students.

East Rock Park

The most obvious choice for a short retreat into nature is East Rock Park, a spot beloved by Yale students due to its short distance from campus and accessibility by foot, Webster said. A leisurely half-hour stroll through the East Rock neighborhood along Orange Street leads across the Mill River and into the park.

Once there, visitors can hike the aptly named Giant’s Steps Trail or wander along a gently sloping paved road. Both options arrive at the summit, where hikers enjoy a hard-earned picnic, admire the Soldiers’ and Sailors’ Monument commemorating New Haven veterans and take in a panoramic view of the city.

In a few months’ time, the park will be filled with color.

“The fall foliage and the colors in there, once the leaves start to change, are going to be pretty awesome,” Webster said.

The Farmington Canal Heritage Trail

The Farmington Canal Heritage Trail is a great place to start when it comes to New Haven’s natural beauty. It connects New Haven to some of the state’s most storied parks.

Owen Setiawan ’27, a co-coordinator of the student group Yale Outdoors, wrote in an email to the News that the trail “is extremely accessible, walkable and bikeable and stretches really far.”

The trail, which runs through Yale’s campus, stretches from New Haven to Northampton, Massachusetts. The trail can be reached down the steps near Benjamin Franklin College and at other access points.

Along the trail, Webster suggested Scantlebury Park, in the Dixwell neighborhood, for a pickleball or basketball game.

Quinnipiac River Park

Located on the east side of Fair Haven, Quinnipiac River Park is one of the few waterfront areas in the city where visitors can spot fish, birds and other wildlife, Webster said. One of the park’s highlights is an osprey nest.

“There’s sort of a view of a version of New Haven that was this town on the water that you get from Quinnipiac River Park that is hard to realize these days,” Webster said. “We don’t have a ton of waterfront space where people can find access and see the water.”

The walk to the park from campus takes almost an hour, but it leads through iconic areas, such as Fair Haven’s Grand Avenue.

“All the different shops and restaurants on Grand Avenue really showcase and represent the Latin American influence in the city,” Webster said.

Edgewood Park

For those seeking nature after a riveting game at the Yale Bowl, nearby Edgewood Park offers tennis courts, pickleball courts and running trails that wind around ponds.



ZOE BERG / STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

New Haven Parks Director Max Webster ENV ’17 shares his favorite places to watch the seasons change.

While the Saturday farmer’s market in Wooster Square is closer to campus, Edgewood Park has its own farmer’s market on Sunday mornings.

CT Transit bus route 243, which stops at the intersection of Broadway and York Street, runs along Whalley Avenue to the park.

Lighthouse Point Park

New Haven might not be known for its beaches, but the city’s coastline brings beautiful spots like Lighthouse Point Park on the eastern point of New Haven harbor.

Yale Outdoors hosts an annual polar plunge at Lighthouse Point in winter as well as regular outdoor opportunities for Yale students in the New Haven area.

The New Haven Parks Department Instagram account also posts monthly calendars listing outdoor events around the city.

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