

Margaret Baghdoyan's reassessment grievance

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To: clerk@norwich.vt.us

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55 NORWICH MEADOWS, UNIT 2
Parcel ID 15-055-002
Margaret Baghdoyan

I am grieving my property assessment on the basis of two issues:

- 1) The attic
- 2) The basement

1) Major error regarding attic:

I am listed as having 6 rooms. Actually I have 5 rooms and an attic. The third floor is not permitted as living space by the Vermont Fire Safety Division. Nor is it attached to the unit heating system. In winter the temperature fluctuates between 40 and 25 degrees

For the attic to be permitted as living space I would have to do major renovations: a) Install a much larger and lower window for a fire egress; b) Change sheetrock to a more fire resistant kind; c) Even then it might not be permitted because the stairs to the 3rd floor are directly above the stairs to the 2nd floor.

I presented the Listers with a copy of a letter from the attorney who handled the closing when I bought my condominium in 2000. She points out this issue. She told me I could neither use it as living space myself nor market it as living space.

2) The Basement

The listers have added the shared basement underneath my unit to the value of my home this year for the first time in 46 years! This basement is common space. Why is it suddenly considered part of my unit when it has never been before?

I challenge this arbitrary change, and I also challenge this addition for several other reasons.

LACK OF FIRE EGRESS

This basement has no fire egress. Robert Howe, Vermont Chief Fire Prevention Officer in 2004, told me bulkhead exits are not considered to be acceptable fire egresses per the Vermont Fire Safety Dept. Per Mr. Howe, the basement underneath my unit can only be used to house the mechanical aspects of the building and heating systems. No other use is allowed. (Please see

the e-mail from Robert Howe.) This basement cannot be used for anything else. No workshop, no storage. Robert Howe told me in a telephone conversation he would not want anyone to be down there for more than 10 minutes or so.

NO ACCESS FROM INSIDE THE UNIT

There is no access to this basement from inside my unit. The only access is through the bulkhead. How can it be considered part of my unit when I can't get into it from the unit?

THE BASEMENT IS SHARED WITH UNIT #3

The Listers have called my basement 640 sq.ft. However, the basement underneath my unit is a shared basement between units #2 and #3. I do not have 640 sq. ft. of usable space. #3's boiler and hot water heater are in my section of the basement, underneath my living room. This takes away a lot of the space and creates many other problems. The noise and smells from them come up into my living space when there is a problem. In 2022 his hot water heater leaked for about three weeks, covering my basement floor with water day after day. This past winter a pipe that is part of his heating system froze and burst and hot water poured onto the floor underneath my living room for hours. What a mess! It was not promptly cleaned up and mold was growing. Having someone else's equipment and pipes in my part of the basement is a real hazard for me because I have no control over it.

Part of the basement underneath my unit is used by #3 as a hallway into its basement. The only way into the basement is through the bulkhead. Neither unit has access to the basement from inside the home. This is a very difficult situation. Entering through the bulkhead is a very noisy process. The metal door screeches and clangs, especially if the person entering is not careful at all. If I am asleep, I wake up. I have lost a lot of sleep due to this issue, and residents of #3 sometimes go down there in the middle of the night or early morning. The door at the bottom of the bulkhead stairs opens into my section of the basement. So every time someone from #3 goes into his basement, he treks through mine. This can be a real problem if the person leaves the outside door open, which, unfortunately the current owner always does. He goes down into his part, leaves the outside door open into my part summer and winter. In winter cold air rushes in underneath my living room. In summer I end up dehumidifying the outside yard! No matter how many times I have asked that man, both verbally and in writing, to close the door immediately after himself, he leaves it open. It has been a great source of distress ever since 2011 when he bought #3.

I have no control over the access into the basement underneath my unit. Nor is use of the entire space solely mine.

Access to this basement in winter is a real challenge. Since the only access is through the bulkhead, that means a lot of snow shoveling to keep a path from my back door to the bulkhead open and the bulkhead itself cleaned off at all times. The Association has refused to be responsible for this shoveling. And people from #3 have contributed virtually no shoveling help. I've ended up doing all the work myself, or as I have gotten older, having to find someone to do it. It is a real challenge.

FLOODING AND MOLD ISSUES

When I moved here in 2000, this basement flooded regularly and often. During spring melt there were about 6 inches of very cold water in the entire basement from anywhere from one to two

weeks. Just a summer thunderstorm would cover almost the whole floor with water. It was a real problem, and as you can imagine black mold was growing everywhere down there. Of course that mold migrated upstairs into the living space as well.

Finally the Association installed a good drainage system in this basement in the fall of 2002, but mold issues continued. The company hired to clean up the mold growing in the basement from years of flooding had no qualifications for this kind of work, and did not do a good job. All they did was spray bleach around. Then they insulated the ceiling and covered the insulation with plastic. The moisture level down there shot through the roof! And there was no dehumidification happening. More mold grew and moved up onto some of the walls inside my home. I had one patch tested to be sure it was mold. It was. Finally the error of the plastic sheeting was corrected, and a couple of dehumidifiers were put down there, and things started to improve. But my house smells always of mold in the summer, my allergy to mold causes me to have runny nose, irritated eyes, sneezing. Even in the winter I can smell the mustiness when I come in after having been away for a few hours.

Flooding does continue to happen from time to time. The sump pump fails, or we have a particularly heavy storm. Also there has been flooding in my basement from the failure of Unit #3's hot water heater and heating system.

Extra expense of dehumidifying:

The cost of dehumidifying the basement falls on me. I have had to buy two dehumidifiers in the 25 years I have lived here. The electricity used by a dehumidifier is considerable. My electric bill shoots up the month I turn it on. I have spent a fortune dehumidifying that basement.

The assessor last time said the basement made my unit more valuable than one on a slab because I could have my heating system and hot water heater down there, and could store stuff down there. I cannot store stuff down there because of the fire egress issue. Yes, I can have my oil fired boiler down there, but these days that kind of heating system is not so desirable. These are the days of the mini split. And without a boiler/furnace in this basement to keep it warm in winter, the basement would be like an ice cube cooling the living space above. In these changing times, having a slab foundation instead of a basement begins to sound better and better.

This basement certainly does not seem like something that should increase the value of the property, rather it is a long list of negatives!