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## BUSINESS

# 'We're on the front lines of gentrification': Beverly tenants protest mass eviction in six-building complex

By Ilana Arougheti  
Chicago Tribune • Published: Jul 24, 2023 at 9:46 am



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Alan Crotty holds a sign while demonstrating with boxes and luggage outside his apartment building in the 10300 block of South Walden Parkway on July 19, 2023, in Chicago. Residents of the apartment building, managed by Levav Properties, have been told they have until the end of September to move out of their units. (John J. Kim/Chicago Tribune)

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When Gordon Dymowski moved into his mother's apartment in Beverly in 2016 to tend to her kidney and heart issues, he found solace in her close-knit community alongside the daily trials of caregiving.

After she died in April 2022, Dymowski hoped to stay in Beverly indefinitely, mourning with his neighbors.

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“It’s a very beautiful area,” Dymowski, 55, told the Chicago Tribune. “As I’ve lived here, even though I was rather isolated in caring for Mom, I got to meet my neighbors going around. And they’re wonderful people. So until the notices came, I had no immediate plans to move.”

Instead, he opened his door on May 25 to find a lease nonrenewal notice taped outside. Levav Properties — a Chicago-based property management company which recently acquired the building — planned to oust Dymowski by the 30th of September.

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The same notice was taped to his neighbor's door. And to every door in the building.

Dymowski is one of more than 120 renters across seven South Side buildings, including his six-building apartment complex in Beverly, who received word in May that their leases would not be up for renewal after the buildings were purchased by Levav Properties.



Gordon Dymowski, center, talks with his neighbors outside their apartment building in the 10300 block of South Walden Parkway on July 19, 2023, in Chicago. Residents of the apartment building, managed by Levav Properties, have been told they have until the end of September to move out of their units. (John J. Kim/Chicago Tribune)

“I’m still grieving my mom, after a year and a month,” Dymowski said. “I’m in a better place for it, and in other circumstances I might be thinking about if it’s better to stay here or move on. The fact that that choice has been taken away from me is devastating.”

### **New challenges for Beverly renters**

Beverly, a close-knit neighborhood off the Metra line on Chicago’s Far South Side, hasn’t

always been at the center of Chicago eviction discourse.

In 2021, only 17% of households in the neighborhood were renter-occupied, [according](#) to the Institute for Housing Studies at DePaul University. Citywide, just over half of residents are renters.

“We’re on the front lines of gentrification,” Dymowski said.

On the morning of July 19, Levav employees posted a new letter on residents’ doors, pledging to slow the timeline of mass eviction set in motion in May.

“NO [sic] evictions have been started and new ownership is dedicated to working with ALL [sic] tenants,” read the letter obtained by the Chicago Tribune. “ ... The Alderman [Matt O’Shea (19th)] has reached out with his concerns, and we are currently working on case-by-case plan [sic] for all tenants.”

Levav did not provide a further description or timeline of these plans, nor did they clarify how long current residents’ evictions will be delayed while individual evaluations take place.

O’Shea told the Tribune that Levav has recently become responsive to meeting with himself and city officials.



Ald. Matt O'Shea, 19th, greets a resident after a rally and protest in the courtyard of an apartment building in the 10300 block of South

Walden Parkway on July 19, 2023, in Chicago. (John J. Kim/Chicago Tribune)

“This is new to me,” O’Shea said. “I haven’t had one of these situations before. I’m sure we’re going to see more and more of it moving forward.”

“Levav Properties understands and has apologized for the frustrating miscommunications that have occurred, including those between the building’s previous and current owners, and its current tenants,” a representative for Levav wrote in a statement to the Tribune. “We are currently gathering all necessary information to help resolve residence concerns.”

Levav Properties declined to comment further for this story.

### **Tenants seek collective bargaining**

Levav’s new tenants, however, have moved past the need for individual solutions.

Some came together to form an informal coalition named after Ald. O’Shea. Backed by the Metropolitan Tenants Organization, O’Shea Neighbors United is demanding more time for displaced residents to find new housing before eviction, as well as relocation assistance and rent forgiveness for the period before moving out.



Residents and housing advocates gather for a rally and protest in the courtyard of an apartment building in the 10300 block of South Walden Parkway on July 19, 2023, in Chicago. (John J. Kim/Chicago Tribune)

O’Shea Neighbors United is also demanding good-faith negotiations — carried out in a group

— between Levav and those tenants who want to stay. This includes assurance of “reasonable” rent hikes.

One in four Beverly renters are considered cost-burdened, or responsible for rent priced higher than a third of their monthly income, according to the Institute for Housing Studies.

Dymowski currently pays \$600 per month for his apartment on South Walden Parkway. Last week, another unit in his complex was listed by Levav Properties for \$1,400 monthly.



Gordon Dymowski talks about the eviction notice in the apartment where he has lived for the past six years as his cat, Frankie, sits nearby in the 10300 block of South Walden Parkway on July 19, 2023, in Chicago. (John J. Kim/Chicago Tribune)

“You can’t charge North Shore and Lincoln Park rent costs for Beverly,” Dymowski said.

The coalition organized a protest on Wednesday afternoon, drawing a crowd of about 75 to the sunny Beverly complex. As Metra trains rumbled by just across the street, some tenants and organizers held signs featuring Levav COO Milliner’s face, above the slogan “Negotiate with us.”

[\[ Cook County program touted as one of the ‘top eviction prevention innovations’ has drawn praise, pushback \]](#)

Sharonda Whitehead, who spoke Wednesday, has lived in Beverly for 18 years. She “fell in

love” with Beverly when her mother worked there as a hairstylist, choosing to raise her own daughter on South Walden Parkway.

Whitehead was among a handful of residents who Levav had planned to evict on August 1. She said she doesn’t want her daughter, now a college graduate, to be forced to look elsewhere for safe harbor.



Residents and housing advocates, including Claudette Boisseau, center, gather for a rally and protest in the courtyard of an apartment building in the 10300 block of South Walden Parkway on July 19, 2023, in Chicago. Residents of the building and nearby apartments, managed by Levav Properties, have been told they have until the end of September to move out of their units. Boisseau said she has lived in her space for 20 years. (John J. Kim/Chicago Tribune)

“What word comes to mind is displacement,” Whitehead said. “They think that we are disposable ... we are veterans here. We are working-class people. We are taxpayers. We are voters. We have rights.”

### **A citywide issue**

Tenants’ rights policies could become more of a priority under Mayor Brandon Johnson’s administration, said Ald. Byron Sigcho-Lopez (25th), who currently chairs the city’s Committee on Housing and Real Estate.

“We understand housing in the city of Chicago as a human right, and we challenge the notion of continuing to treat housing as a commodity,” Sigcho-Lopez said.

Allowing property developers to legally evict and displace hundreds of people without public



...ing property developers to legally evict and displace hundreds of people without public outcry — or city pushback — sets a dangerous precedent for unjust treatment of renters, Sigcho-Lopez said.



Ald. Byron Sigcho-Lopez, 25th, addresses residents and housing advocates during a rally and protest in the courtyard of an apartment building in the 10300 block of South Walden Parkway on July 19, 2023, in Chicago. (John J. Kim/Chicago Tribune)

It's a narrative that's played out many times in other Chicago neighborhoods.

Displacement of renters has created similar tensions in areas including Pilsen, Little Village and Uptown, Sigcho-Lopez said.

"[Landlords] profit from our communities but they do not care or invest in our communities," he said.

*[ [Dominic Voz: Chicago should follow other cities and protect tenants from unjust evictions](#) ]*

Currently, Chicago landlords like Levav can legally move to evict without having to provide a reason.

One in four evictions in Chicago are carried out without stated reason, or "just cause," according to Just Cause Chicago, a Chicago Housing Justice League initiative.

In some cities, including Washington, D.C. and Los Angeles, just cause eviction policies require landlords to either demonstrate tenant fault or pay for relocation assistance.

A piece of similar legislation, the Just Cause Ordinance, was introduced to the Chicago City Council in 2020. The proposal saw some support from former Mayor Lori Lightfoot, but stalled out in favor of a limited set of [protections](#) under the city's Residential Landlord Tenant Ordinance.

The Chicago Housing Justice League and other organizations backing O'Shea Neighbors United are still calling for just cause eviction, said CHJL organizer Seven DeAssis-Collins, who spoke at Wednesday's protest.

South Walden residents, who now face "a multitude of disruptions" from financial burdens to emotional distress, are a prime example of why Chicago fair housing advocates are still working to bring back just cause legislation, DeAssis-Collins said.

"Levav would not be running rampant in Beverly if they had to pay out thousands of dollars to these tenants," said ArieH Vernick, a Metropolitan Tenants Organization organizer who has been working closely with O'Shea Neighbors United.

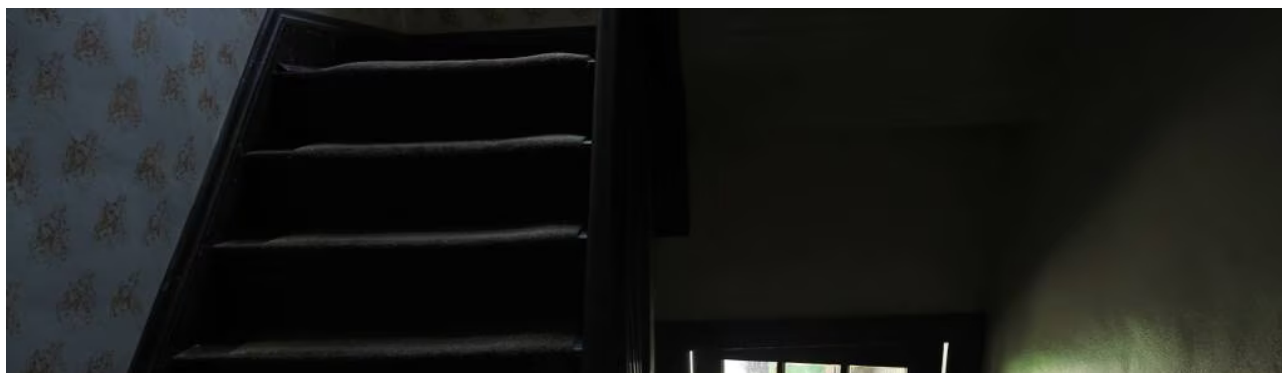
### **Preparing to leave**

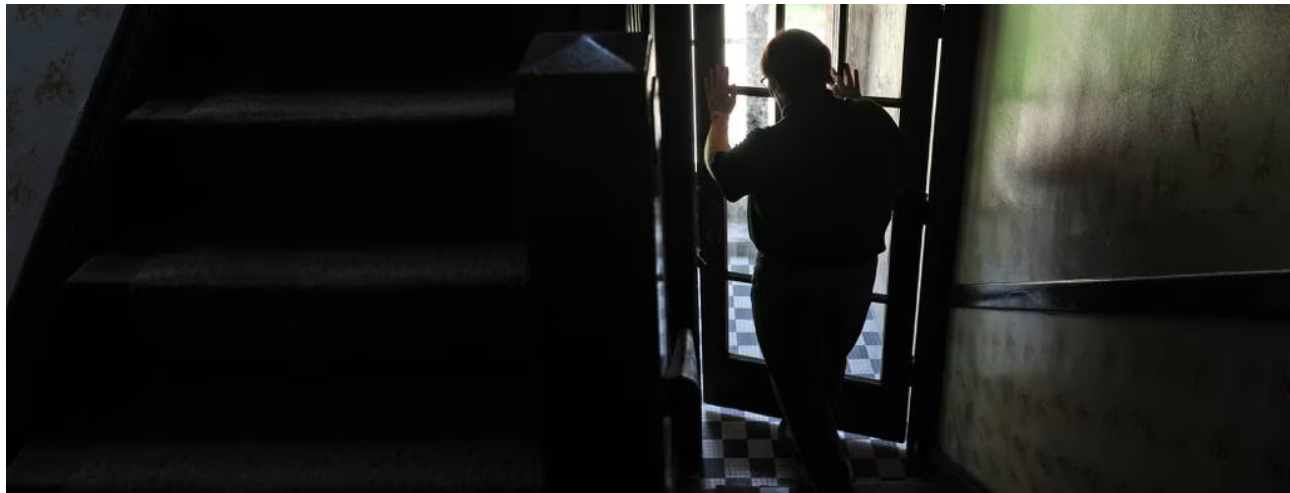
As the members of O'Shea Neighbors United began to organize their demands in recent weeks, some experienced additional communication issues with Levav.

After paying his June rent on the first of the month, Dymowski received a text from a Levav property manager saying his rent had not been received, and threatening legal action. Another building in Dymowski's complex was without hot water for more than two weeks, he said.

Though these maintenance issues were eventually resolved, Levav representatives refused to meet with members of O'Shea Neighbors United when several tenants made a trip to Milliner's office in Beverly in late June.

"There's been no willingness to talk with us as a group," Dymowski said. "It's always been a very hands-off approach. And it's a very disrespectful approach."





Gordon Dymowski opens the front entrance to his apartment building where he has lived for the past six years on July 19, 2023, in Chicago. “We’re on the front lines of gentrification,” Dymowski said. (John J. Kim/Chicago Tribune)

Dymowski, a freelance copywriter, says he feels like he’s “facing a ticking clock,” as he can’t currently afford to move. However, he says he feels lucky to be comparatively young and mobile. He can relocate without physical help and apply for full-time office jobs.

This isn’t the case for Dymowski’s neighbors, many of whom are elderly and have been in their apartments for decades.

“The fact is, I don’t know where all this is going to go,” Dymowski said. “But I also am young enough that it’s going to be hard, but I can move forward and rationalize it as getting on with my life after Mom. For a lot of these people, their lives are here.”

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