ROCKVILLE RENTERS UNITED

Renters United

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2026

FREE. TAKE ONE!

Landlord/developer cash pouring into local races



We're seeing a major shift in the flow of corporate campaign dollars. In past elections, landlord and developer Super PACs* were interested mainly in state and national races. But lately, they've begun spending eye-watering sums to influence *local* campaigns.

For example, *Affordable Maryland*—a Rockville-based Super PAC—spent nearly $1 million this year on ads targeting a leading supporter of rent stabilization, county executive candidate Will Jawando. Their ads were so misleading Maryland Sen. Chris Van Hollen condemned them as "lies."

The ad money came largely from developers with economic interests in Rockville. The Polinger Company—Rockville's largest landlord, with 1,149 apartment units—donated $100,000 for the ads, while B.F. Saul (developer of Twinbrook Quarter) donated $150,000.

Affordable Maryland also collected $20,800 for political mailings backing four opponents of rent stabilization in the 2023 Rockville City Council elections: Mayor Monique Ashton, and Council members Kate Fulton, Marissa Valeri, and Adam Van Grack.**

The $20,800 was more than some successful council candidates raised for their entire campaigns, and more than 50 times the amount spent by all outside entities during the 2019 council elections. (Outside entities spent only $413 that cycle.)

Grassroots organizing beats corporate cash

Renter advocates can expect landlords and developers to spend even more to influence future local elections. (Adding insult to injury, it's *our money*—tenants' rent money—oiling the machine!)

But we have seen how grassroots organizing and involvement can beat corporate cash. Despite the $1 million in attack ads, Will Jawando handily defeated his primary opponents, a win his team credits to well-organized community volunteers.

So talk with your neighbors about the sort of community they want to live in. Talk about the problems we share and what we can do together to solve them.

Renters can't match the corporate donors dollar for dollar, but they can never match our numbers. *The future is ours if we unite.*

* The 2010 Supreme Court ruling in Citizens United allows Super PACs (Political Action Committees) to collect and spend unlimited amounts of money to support or defeat political candidates so long as the funds are not given directly to individual campaigns.
** Not included in the mailings were Council member Barry Jackson, who voted to ban discussion of rent stabilization during public sessions, and Council members Izola Shaw and David Myles, both of whom support rent stabilization.

New publication from Rockville Renters United:

How to Start a Tenant Organization



There's a simple reason our landlords call the shots while we tenants have no say about what happens in the buildings where we live. The landlords are organized. They can plan, act, and speak with one voice.

We, on the other hand, are a collection of individuals trying to deal one-on-one with billion-dollar corporations. No wonder we are easy prey!

It does not have to be like this. Tenants have common problems and needs. All we lack is organization.

Rockville Renters United is preparing a handbook on building tenant associations to start organizing with your neighbors. Subscribe to our mailing list to receive notification when it's available: **www.rockvillerenters.org/**

Highlights of the handbook

Build community/Overcome isolation: It's easy to feel isolated living in an apartment. But we can break down barriers and get to know our neighbors. Learn about successful community-building events Rockville tenant associations have sponsored, including Halloween "Trunk or Treats," cookie decorating and game nights.

Build organization/Take action: Learn how to introduce the idea of forming a tenants association, identify activists, pinpoint common problems in our buildings, develop demands, and negotiate with landlords and building managers.

Build power/Share resources: Tenant associations can share information about the legal rights of renters, the responsibilities of landlords, city codes, complaint procedures and other laws and regulations. We need to provide timely, accurate answers to tenants needing assistance. Learn sources of information and ways to organize together from fellow tenant associations. Our numbers count when we act together!

***Renters United* is produced by Rockville tenants and published by Rockville Renters United (RRU).** As a community publication, we need writers, artists, photographers and story ideas. To help, contact newsletter@rockvillerenters.org. To learn about RRU and how to form a tenants association where you live, visit rockvillerenters.org.

The following local businesses distribute ***Renters United*** and we appreciate their support. **King Farm:** King Craft Beer and Wine, Coffee Republic, King Farm Cleaners, Parcel Plus and Italiamo Restaurant. **Town Center:** Bonchon, BobaPop, Hair Design Zone, Dirty Dough, World of Beer, and Tiger Beer and Wine. **Twinbrook:** Rockville Brews and Bubble Tea Cafe. **Woodley Gardens:** Z&Z Manoushe Bakery, Neighbors Coffee. **Surrounding Areas:** Clear Skies Meadery and Liora's Whole Pet.

Who owns my building?

Who is your landlord? Who pockets your rent checks and hires your building manager? It's important to know! Can the landlord afford to spend more for maintenance and repairs? Do they really need another rent hike or higher fees?

Every issue, Renters United explores who owns Rockville's apartments. As you'll see, most "local" landlords are billion-dollar corporations based in other states. Every month, tens of millions of dollars in rent flows out of our community, harming local businesses and weakening our economy.



The Stories at Congressional Plaza

Largest apartment owner/manager in U.S.

Greystar: Financial Death Star or Superstar?

With 1.1 million units, Greystar Real Estate Partners (Greystar) is *by far* the largest owner/manager of apartments in the U.S.—nearly three times the size of their closest competitor.

Greystar is an important local landlord, with 3,700 units in 12 Montgomery County complexes, including two Rockville complexes: *The Stories at Congressional Plaz*a and *The Huntington at King Farm.*

Founded 33 years ago, the company's rise to the top has been nothing short of meteoric. Its success has been driven by "vertical integration"—the ownership of a number of key revenue streams which keeps profits flowing despite ups and downs in the housing market.

Sixty percent of Greystar's revenue flows from a steady, low-risk source: fees collected for managing other companies' properties. Thirty-five percent comes from higher-risk (but higher reward) activities: buying, building, and operating their own properties. The remaining 5 percent is income from managing a $79 billion investment fund.

Only closely vetted, extremely wealthy individuals and major financial institutions are permitted to invest in Greystar.



The Huntington at King Farm

Greystar Real Estate Partners

- S. C.-based private equity co.
- $350B global real estate holdings
- CEO Bob Smith's net worth: $5.5B

Breaking Bad

With great wealth and power come great temptations to bend the rules and step on the less powerful. Lately, Greystar has been making headlines for exactly that sort of behavior.

Last year, Greystar paid $57 million to nine states, including Maryland, to settle lawsuits over the use of "algorithmic rent-setting" (computerized systems that allow landlords to collude in fixing rents). And in June, the Guardian newspaper reported Greystar hiked the cost of rent an average 20% a month by billing tenants for "a mass" of questionable fees.

Reporters studied leases and court records from 42 states and the District of Columbia and found Greystar was billing tenants for more than 125 fees bearing different names and no specific price. They included fees for "boiler management," "variable refrigerant flow," "solar re-bills," and "utility administration". Tenants were often unaware the fees existed before being billed.

In July, the non-profit Housing Rights Initiative (HRI) accused Greystar of violating the civil rights of low-income tenants. HRI filed lawsuits against the company in Maryland, the District of Columbia, and five other states.

According to HRI investigators, Greystar broke local and state laws by rejecting 114 applications from tenants seeking to use Section 8 housing vouchers to help pay rent.



Show Your Support! Spread the Word! We want to make Rockville a renter-friendly city.

Scan this QR Code to order your RRU T-Shirt today! ($20 plus shipping):

OR go to: bit.ly/rru-shirt

Up-Coming Events

Circle the Date!

Public Citywide Tenant Meeting: Tues., Nov. 10, 7 p.m.-8:30 p.m., Rockville Memorial Library, Town Center. *Calling all Rockville renters: It's time we get together!* Renters make up nearly *half* the population of Rockville! Let's use our numbers and make our city a renter-friendly place to live.



More than 400 local residents had fun at RRU's 'Trunk or Treat' party Oct. 28 in Mattie J. T. Stepanek Park.