

Queens Co-op Capitalizes on Freak Storm to Make Fixes

By Tom Soter

It was a freak storm but it saved the co-op \$2.5 million. At least that's one way some might look at it.

Tennis View Apartments, the 177-unit co-op located in the posh Forest Hills Gardens homeowners association in Queens, is part of a small enclave designed in the early twentieth century by Frederick Law Olmsted Jr., son of the renowned landscape architect who helped shape Central and Prospect Parks. The lush landscaping was inspired by the "garden city movement," which aimed to create green oases amidst urban centers. Many of the buildings — a mix of single-family homes, cottages, and apartment buildings — are in the Tudor style, with brick walls, exposed timbers, and terra-cotta roof tiles.

The Tennis View Apartments' two mid-rise buildings, finished in 1917 and 1919, stand next to the West Side Tennis Club, which was established in 1913 and served as home to the U.S. Open tennis tournament for several years before it relocated to nearby Flushing Meadows. The streets and parks are privately owned by the Forest Hills Gardens Corp., which must approve all modifications to building exteriors.

In 2010, Tennis View faced a crisis: it lost most of the century-old red tiles that sat on the roofs when a "microburst" hit. That's a sudden downward burst of wind from the base of a thunderstorm that can rush toward the ground at speeds of 60 MPH before hitting the surface and spreading out in all directions. "It blew half of the tiles off," says **Ken Lovett**, president of the **Lovett Group**, the property's managing agent. Although there were still roofs on the structures, they lacked the extra protection of the tiles, and, Lovett notes, "you had a tremendous number of leaks. It's a very steep roof."

The job, which after multiple sealed bids employed Midtown Preservation and Xenos Contracting, started in fall 2011 and continued for 15 months. One of the unexpected challenges — discovered after the tiles were gone — was the sorry condition of the roof.

"It was more deteriorated than we thought," explains Lovett, whose firm took over the buildings in 2011. "You [previously] couldn't see the underlying problems, because the tile hid them. The wood underneath the tile was completely rotted. You did have some asbestos in



the glue. That had to be tested and abated." In addition, this particular clay tile was only available from one Pennsylvania manufacturer.

There were further delays because all the exterior work had to be approved by the homeowners' association. At the same time, with the \$2.5 million it obtained from its insurance, the co-op made façade repairs, which involved "a lot architectural detail, where the board had to make certain decisions on how they wanted it to look like," Lovett says.

The board, led by then-president Arlene Convoy (succeeded by Grace Sommero) and aided by Doug Lennihan, chairman of the maintenance committee, had weekly progress reports and was very involved in the project, Lovett says, adding: "It was a team effort."

Finally, how did the co-op save \$2.5 million in this whole affair? Simple. The roofs on both buildings were near the end of their useful lives. With leaks increasing, they were about ready to be replaced. "It really worked out to [the condo's] advantage," Lovett says. "It was not pleasant when it happened, but financially, over the long term, it worked out well for the buildings. Otherwise, they would have had to have a \$2 million assessment to do all this work. They pretty much got this new roof for free."