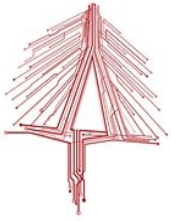


Evictions and COVID-19: The Responsibility of the Large Landlord



A Research Brief from the Boston Area Research Initiative and the
Metropolitan Area Planning Council



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The possibility of a pandemic-related “eviction tsunami” has been widely discussed of late, as is the role that federal and state policy must play stemming it. Less prominent has been the discussion of the role that must be played by landlords in general – and, as our recent research has found – large landlords in particular.

The Boston Area Research Initiative (BARI) and the Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC), in partnership with partners at the City of Boston’s Department of Neighborhood Development, have studied evictions in the City of Boston in 2015-16, and what we have found can inform local, state, and federal response to the current crisis.¹

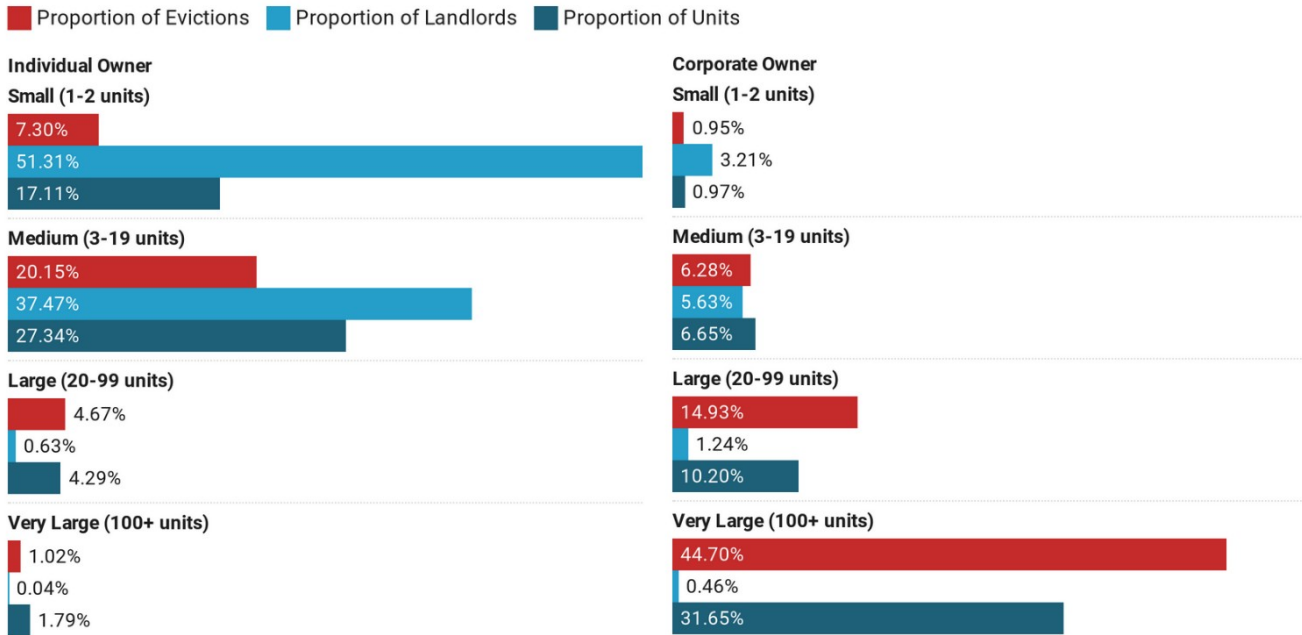
We categorized landlords by the number of units they own, classifying those with 20 to 99 units as “Large,” and those with 100 or more units as “Very Large.” We also determined whether the landlord in question is a corporate entity. This revealed that different types of landlords exhibit different patterns of eviction.

This work historically been hard to do, as eviction records are difficult to obtain; and many corporate landlords obscure their ownership by using many names and Limited Liability Corporations (LLCs) on official records. BARI conducted an in-depth analysis, linking corporations listed as owners in the property assessment records to official registration documents, thereby uncovering many of these ownership structures and linking together properties that are owned by the same entity but under different names. At this time, the analysis has only been conducted for the City of Boston.

We found that large and very large corporate landlords made up the majority of evictors in 2015-2016. Together they were responsible for almost 60% of all evictions (over 4,700 evictions). What is most striking is that **while very large corporate landlords (those with 100+ units) represent less than 0.5% of landlords and only 32% of rental units in Boston, they were responsible for 45% of all evictions in 2015 and 2016.**

¹ While evictions filings are increasing even more strikingly across the state, the granular data needed for this analysis is currently only available in Boston.

Evictions by Owner Size and Corporate Nature (2015-2016)



Sizes are based on the total number of rental units owned in Boston. Eviction data is based on 7,930 evictions for which geographic information allowed for connection to ownership information out of a total 10,137 evictions in 2015-2016.

Chart: Forrest Hagen, BARI • Source: BARI's Housing Database • Created with Datawrapper

Meanwhile, small and medium-sized individual landlords – despite comprising almost 90% of all landlords and 44% of all rental units, were only responsible for 27% of evictions. While not shown on the chart, our research also found that only 10% of evictions happen in buildings that are owner-occupied, further suggesting that small landlords who have a personal relationship with their tenants may be more willing to work with them to avoid eviction.

Since large corporate landlords were responsible for a disproportionate share of evictions during pre-pandemic times, they will also have a critical role to play in preventing an eviction crisis in the coming months.

In recent weeks, 53 owners and landlords have signed onto the state's [Eviction Diversion Pledge](#) – a five-part commitment. The landlords pledge to abide by the CDC moratorium; to proactively work with tenants to create payment plans; to accept rental assistance payments; to promote rent adjustments for voucher holders; and to engage in structured and interactive mediation. The landlords who have signed the pledge should be applauded for their leadership.

Other landlords have shown a reluctance or have refused to sign on. While there are 53 owners who have signed the pledge, there are over 1,600 large and very large corporate owners in Boston. Who are the owners who haven't signed the pledge and what is their history of eviction?

We identified 18 large and very large corporate landlords linked to at least 30 evictions each across the two-year study period. The list includes both those who both signed and did not sign the Eviction Diversion Pledge. Collectively, these landlords owned an estimated 10,800 units and were associated with more than 1,700 evictions in Boston alone, approximately 17% of the total. The lists below specify which owners and operators have and have not yet signed the Eviction Diversion pledge:

Large Corporate Owners Who Have Signed Pledge

Beacon Communities
Caritas Communities
City Realty
Cruz Companies
Maloney Properties, Inc.
The Peabody Properties
Trinity Financial
WinnCompanies

Total: Estimated 6,800 units owned/operated
1,219 Evictions in 2015-2016; 12.0% of total evictions

Large Corporate Owners Who Have Not Signed Pledge

Advance Property Management
Alliance Realty Management
Commonwealth Holdings Group LLC
Commonwealth Real Estate Management
The Hamilton Company
Premier Property Solutions
The Samia Companies
Sentry Property Management Corporation
UDR, Inc
Wallace Property Management

Total: Estimated 4,000 units owned/operated
508 Evictions in 2015-2016; 5.0% of total evictions

The eight owners who have signed the pledge conducted an average of 75 evictions per year during the study period, so it is particularly meaningful that they have chosen to suspend those actions for the time being. Those who have not signed the pledge were, on average, associated with approximately 25 evictions per year during pre-pandemic times, making them worthy of scrutiny and further encouragement to sign the pledge. Collectively, those who have not signed own over 4,000 units and were responsible for approximately 5% of the total evictions between 2015 and 2016. If we can convince these landlords to sign on to the pledge—and to follow through on its commitments—we can take a small step in keeping people in their homes

We recognize that this analysis is based on patterns of evictions from four and five years ago. It doesn't provide a definitive indication of what landlords are filing cases now or pressuring their tenants in other ways. Therefore, more needs to be done to assess the current situation. This may include collecting data from the Massachusetts Court System about evictions filed since October in order to identify landlords responsible for an outsized share of filings. Analysts should also assess whether some landlords are refusing to accept RAFT payments or refusing to engage in pre-court negotiations in good faith.

Of course, more needs to be done at the state and federal level to provide a more systemic response to the current crisis. Since the CDC moratorium is now scheduled to end on January 31, even those who have signed the pledge will be free to evict unless the moratorium is further extended. The state and federal government need to take affirmative steps to preserve tenancy for those facing eviction; and to provide rental assistance support sufficient to meet the needs of tenants and landlords.

Many parties have a role to play in protecting tenants during these challenging times. We hope that this analysis will spur outreach to landlords who have not yet taken a leadership role, prompt additional collaboration to understand this crisis, and support an effective response to the looming possibility of an "eviction tsunami."