

No loft lost

by Norma Munn

Monday, November 01, 1999 12:00 AM -

Loft-dwellers again found themselves political pawns in the Albany budget battle. The Loft Law, first passed in 1982, allows artists to live legally in commercial loft spaces in the City. The law aims to bring those buildings converted to residential use into compliance with NYC and NYS housing laws. The recently-passed legislation grants loft-owners another 21 months to be in compliance, so they may eventually receive a residential certificate of occupancy. Of the estimated 4500-5000 loft units in the City, only one-third has achieved compliance; a substantial number are awaiting inspection.

As in each of the last two legislative sessions, the issue was held hostage to the larger budget battle. Assembly Speaker Silver was unwilling to compromise on an issue of great interest and importance to his constituents. The Loft Law was to be part of an omnibus bill, but last minute efforts by the Governor to add Powerball to the bill dissolved the tentative consensus. The law finally passed, but only once paired with the renewal of Quick Draw Video Lottery. This odd pairing has earned loft residents and owners yet another extension in this 17 year saga.

Norma Sounds Off:

It is ironic that 'the world's greatest city', whose identity is so closely associated with the arts, should have such ill-defined policies about it. In fact, there is no coherent City policy about the arts. Decisions are made ad hoc from year to year. The City needs to decide what are issues of importance and budgetary priorities in the arts.

Norma Munn is Chair of the New York City Arts Coalition, founder and President of the Artists Community Federal Credit Union, and former Chair of The City Club of New York.