

Sports: Jim Mora era kicks off as UConn football opens at Utah State **Page D1**

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HOUSING
SOLUTIONS LAB



Some families are just a paycheck away from homelessness

Life on the edge

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The Day

New London

THE CITY LOST 124 HOUSING units for low-income families after the closure and demolition of the federally subsidized Thames River Apartments, but the need for affordable housing remains.

HOUSING LAB

Struggling to Move On

According to New London's Affordable Housing Plan, 1,686 more households earn less than 30% of the area median income than there are available affordably priced units with monthly gross rents at or below \$605.

And the need is not just in the City of New London.

New London County has only 10,861 housing units considered affordable for the 14,624 households of one or more people earning 30% or less of the county median household income of \$71,368, according to a study done by Urban Institute in 2021 using census data from 2018.

That means almost 4,000 households would not be able to find



affordable housing. The scarcity is greatest for those with larger households.

About 73% of federal- and state-subsidized housing units in the county are age-restricted, according to the state Department of Housing. Of the 29 federal- and state-subsidized public housing properties in the county, only eight

allow families.

The Day sat down with families who resided at the Thames River Apartments prior to its closure in 2018 and now find themselves living in cramped spaces, unable to afford more.

Searching for stability

In 2017, Aleshia Valero, then

known as Aleshia Meier and living in the A building, had heard people talk for two years about the apartments closing and residents receiving vouchers.

She was anxious to leave, as mold in her apartment's ceiling was making her sick.

Valero said she had applied to Branford Manor, a federally subsidized complex in Groton, but could not get on the waiting list because she owed money on a cell phone bill. Around the same time, Valero's father died and left her some insurance money.

Valero didn't have the credit score needed to purchase a home, so she pooled the money together with savings and bought a trailer home in Groton. She continues to live off Poquonock Road around the corner of the Citgo gas station, where there is a narrow, unnamed road that leads to Laurel Hill Mobile Home Park.

A short time after leaving the Thames River Apartments, Valero learned she was pregnant with twins.

Today, there is rarely a moment of silence in her two-bedroom, single-wide trailer home, living with

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Above: Aleshia Valero helps her son Emerson, 3, jump off a slide as he plays with his siblings Esme, 3, and Amryn, 8, at Poquonock Plains Park in Groton. Valero, who lived at New London's Thames River Apartments prior to their closure, now lives with her four children in a two-bedroom trailer she owns in Groton. **Top:** Amryn dances with Esme as Aleshia and Emerson look on during an impromptu dance party.

WEATHER

Today, mostly sunny, warm and humid. High 81. Sunday, partly sunny and humid. High 78. **D6**

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FATHER, SON CLINGING TO COOLER RESCUED IN BOSTON HARBOR

Boston — In the nick of time, the Boston Police Department's harbor patrol unit rescued a father and son who were desperately clinging to a drinks cooler at the outermost edge of Boston Harbor after their lobster boat sank.

Officers Stephen Merrick and Garrett Boyle responded to a call of a boat taking on water at about 6:30 p.m. Wednesday near Graves Light Station, police said in a statement. The privately owned lighthouse is on a rocky islet about 9 miles from the coast.

On approach, the officers only saw a small portion of the vessel Glory Days' bow above water, but as they got closer they saw the two men holding on to the bobbing blue cooler.

"You could see the fear in their face," Merrick said. "They were cold. They looked very tired and weak."

The dramatic rescue was caught on police

body camera video.

"We're so weak," the younger man is heard saying.

He then asked the officers to rescue his 76-year-old father, who was wearing a life vest.

"Help him up please," he said. "Help him up first."

The younger man, who was holding onto a life ring, was then pulled onto the police boat by the officers.

The men said their boat's 28-foot engine got tangled in lobster lines and failed. The current pushed the boat onto the rocks and punctured the hull, police said.

The men were taken to shore, where emergency medical technicians treated them for minor injuries. Their boat was towed from the scene.

— The Associated Press

Wet walk



ASHWINI BHATIA/AP PHOTO
People walk in the rain Friday in Dharamshala, India. Rainfall has overwhelmed the region over the past week.

FBI says Trump withheld secret papers

Long-awaited affidavit is heavily redacted after judge OKs release

By ERIC TUCKER
Associated Press

Washington — Fourteen of the 15 boxes recovered from former President Donald Trump's Florida estate early this year contained classified documents, many of them top secret, mixed in with miscellaneous newspapers, magazines and personal correspondence, according to an FBI affidavit released Friday.

No space at Trump's Mar-a-Lago estate was authorized for the storage of classified material, according to the court papers, which laid out the FBI's rationale for searching the property this month, including "probable cause to believe that evidence of obstruction will be found."

The 32-page affidavit — heavily redacted to protect the safety of witnesses and law enforcement officials and "the integrity of the ongoing investigation" — offers the most detailed description to date of the government records being stored at Mar-a-Lago long after Trump left the White House. It also reveals the gravity of the government's concerns that the documents were there illegally.

The document makes clear how the haphazard retention of top secret government records, and the apparent

SEE FBI PAGE A3

Inside: Takeaways from unsealed Mar-a-Lago search affidavit. **A3**

NL County declared a disaster area due to drought

By ERICA MOSER
Day Staff Writer

Salem — Standing in front of shorter-than-usual pasture on Friday, Producer Farm owner Hannah Tripp said there are three main ramifications from this summer's drought, and that she will likely apply for aid available as part of a new disaster declaration.

The first is that while her farm still has water, it doesn't have a permanent irrigation system, and so workers must manually move sprinklers across the farms.

"We have had to make hard choices to prioritize certain crops over others," Tripp said.

She added she thinks she'll lose the fall crops that are planted early, such as potatoes and squash.

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Amryn, above, takes out a pot for macaroni and cheese. Below, Valero cuddles with Esme on the sofa that doubles as her bed at their trailer.

Mayor laments the lack of subsidized housing in city

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four of her five children and their emotional support dog. The couch in the living room doubles as Valero's bed.

Valero wishes she could move to a bigger space, but she has been either unemployed, or underemployed, since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. Finding a stable job flexible enough to accommodate her motherly duties has been a challenge for Valero, the main provider for her children.

"The system is designed to keep you locked in," Valero said. "The more you make, the more they take and it makes it harder to save."

Valero said she felt like she didn't quite fit in at "Crystal." She did, however, have a good relationship with neighbors on her floor. They would take their kids to the park together, make dinner or babysit each other's kids.

"It wasn't that bad," Valero said. "It was more of a crime the way they let us live."

Valero said there was no security at the apartment complex. She always felt safe in her apartment, but she and her oldest child, Rowan, described seeing people set cars on fire and homeless people loitering in the laundry room.

Valero's last job was working at LEARN's Pathway Program in East Lyme. She was a van aide helping to keep calm kids with developmental disabilities.

"I loved that job, seeing the smiles on their faces ... If I could've



had more hours I would've stayed," Valero said.

She delivers groceries for Instacart with her children in the backseat and does some sewing work, but neither of those jobs provides a steady income.

Cost burdened

Like roughly 24% of renter households in New London County, Valero

is "cost-burdened." Another 22 percent of renters in the county are "severely cost-burdened," according to the Urban Institute study.

The Urban Institute defines cost-burdened as those spending 30% to 40% of their income on housing costs, and severely cost-burdened as those spending 50% or more of their income on housing costs.

Valero was staying afloat during

the pandemic with stimulus checks, unemployment and the income tax credits she received for her children.

She uses some of the disability check she receives for her oldest son, who is autistic, to pay the \$535 in rent for the trailer lot each month, paying the rest with what she makes from Instacart.

She is typically left with \$100 each

week after paying \$80-90 for gas, cell phone and car insurance. The rest of her money goes toward day care and occupational therapy for her kids.

Behind on her car payments for the past three months, Valero is afraid she'll lose the car soon. She is also months behind on her electricity and credit bills.

Valero has been applying to jobs for months, but said it's hard when they ask for experience or won't hire her if she can't work weekends.

Valero feels she missed out on getting a Section 8 housing voucher when she left the Thames River Apartments prior to its closure, because she could be living in a bigger apartment and paying less.

Lack of family units

New London Mayor Michael Passero laments the lack of subsidized and affordable multi-family housing in the city.

"I wish the housing authority had an inventory of family units that were available," Passero said. "There would be a waiting list, but at least we would have (a number of) units available for families that needed them."

Annual audits from the New London Housing Authority and the state Department of Housing show a \$500,000 drop in federal low-income subsidies between 2018, the year the Thames River Apartments closed, to 2019 when all of the subsidy went to Williams Park, the remaining federal property.

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Norwich family faces numerous housing hurdles

Norwich

ABOUT 14 MILES north of New London along the Thames River, Esther and Alexander Viver have resided for four years in a tight one-bedroom apartment on Franklin Street in Norwich.

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It's all they can afford right now, though they're striving for better.

The Vivers met as kids and started dating when they were teenagers at New London's Thames River Apartments.

Esther Viver grew up visiting her sisters who lived at the high-rise apartments until she moved in with one of them before turning 15.

The federally subsidized Thames River Apartments closed in 2018 as the result of a class action lawsuit fo-

cused on poor living conditions. The loss of 124 affordable housing units added to a growing deficit in New London County, where, according to a 2021 study by the Urban Institute, there is a shortage of nearly 4,000 affordable housing units.

At the Viver home, the bedroom door is immediately to the left of the front door, and the living room barely fits a three-seat couch and TV stand. The bathroom and kitchen are squeezed into the back corner of the space. The space has become significantly smaller with the arrival of the married couple's first child earlier this year.

Since she was 20, Viver has been diagnosed with endometriosis and experiences debilitating pain. Before getting pregnant last summer, Viver was under the impression that she would never be able to have kids.

"He's my little miracle," Viver said

Esther Viver plans to return to work so she can work on her goal to own a home.

about her son.

In 2006, Esther was 18 and moved out of the apartments when she and her now-husband Alexander got their first apartment on Truman Street in New London.

She said they were making good money. Her husband worked in landscaping and she worked with CT Care 4 Kids, a child care provider for low- to moderate-income families, and McDonald's.

They left the state for a few years and then came back to live in Norwich in 2015.

Viver was working as a patient

care assistant but stopped under doctor's orders due to her endometriosis. Since then, the couple manages solely on the husband's seasonal occupation as a landscaper, and it's been a challenge. During the season, he works 40 to 56 hours a week and earns around \$3,000 a month, and they save up for the winter months, when he's laid off.

"I get anxious and think, 'How are we going to pay this?'" Viver said.

Their expenses include heat, electric, internet and cell phones.

Viver said electric goes up to \$400 or

\$500 in the winter, costing them up

to \$1,000 extra.

She relies on "couponing" to stock up on hygiene items and other essentials, but finds it difficult with little storage space.

The Vivers experience plumbing issues at their apartment. Esther Viver

showed a video of water leaking from

around the bathroom light fixture above the bathtub.

There is mold along the kitchen ceiling to which she is allergic, but she said their landlord is responsive when they have an issue, and flexible when they are behind on their rent.

They have considered looking at other apartments, but Viver said they are too expensive, with the average two-bedroom apartment in the area priced at around \$1,300 a month, excluding utilities. They have tried applying to subsidized housing, but the waiting lists are long.

Viver plans to return to work so she can work on her goal to own a home. The biggest hurdle, she said, is coming up with enough savings for a deposit. She has been doing research on programs that might help.

For now, they'll stay put until their financial situation changes.

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