

SUPREME COURT OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK, APPELLATE DIVISION,
THIRD DEPARTMENT

Creech v. Rufa

101 A.D.3d 1224 (N.Y. App. Div. 2012) · Decided December 6, 2012

SUMMARY

The court held that a mechanic’s lien is invalid unless the property owner or the owner’s agent affirmatively requested or consented to the lienor’s services. It affirmed summary judgment vacating the liens because the owner’s awareness, acquiescence, contract signature, and attendance at planning-board meetings did not establish affirmative consent, and it also affirmed denial of the defendants’ motion for renewal.

CASE DETAILS

COURT	Supreme Court of the State of New York, Appellate Division, Third Department
WRITING FOR THE COURT	Garry, J.; Mercure, J.P.; Lahtinen, J.; Kavanagh, J.; McCarthy, J.
JURISDICTION	New York
DECIDED	December 6, 2012
DISPOSITION	affirmed
PROCEDURAL POSTURE	Defendants appealed from orders granting plaintiff's cross motion for summary judgment vacating mechanics' liens and denying defendants' motion for renewal and reargument.
STANDARD OF REVIEW	The court reviewed the propriety of summary judgment under the standard requiring the movant to establish entitlement to judgment as a matter of law and the opponent to demonstrate triable issues of fact. The denial of renewal was reviewed under CPLR 2221(e), including whether newly discovered evidence and a justifiable excuse were shown.
PRECEDENTIAL VALUE	published
PARTIES	Defendants v. Creech

TOPICS

- mechanics liens
- summary judgment
- motion for reconsideration
- real estate
- construction law

PRACTICE AREAS

real estate

construction law

civil procedure

remedies

QUESTIONS PRESENTED

1. Whether defendants' mechanics' liens were valid when the property owner had not requested or affirmatively consented to defendants' services.
2. Whether defendants established triable issues of fact sufficient to defeat plaintiff's motion for summary judgment vacating the liens.
3. Whether defendants were entitled to renewal based on a certified subdivision-application document obtained after the summary judgment order.
4. Whether an appeal lies from the denial of a motion for reargument.

HOLDINGS

1. A mechanics' lien on real property is invalid unless the property owner or the owner's agent requested or consented to the lienor's services through some affirmative act; the owner's awareness or acquiescence alone is insufficient.
2. Summary judgment vacating the mechanics' liens was proper because plaintiff established entitlement to judgment as a matter of law and defendants failed to raise a triable issue concerning any affirmative act of consent.
3. Supreme Court properly denied defendants' motion for renewal because the certified subdivision-application document was not newly discovered evidence and defendants failed to show a justifiable excuse for not obtaining a certified copy earlier.
4. No appeal lies from the denial of a motion for reargument.

KEY QUOTATIONS

“A mechanic’s lien on real property is not valid unless the property owner or the owner’s agent requested or consented to the lienor’s services, and such consent must be shown by some affirmative act, and not merely by the owner’s acquiescence or awareness” (101 A.D.3d at 1225-1226)

“Accordingly, defendants failed to establish the existence of issues of fact as to whether plaintiff took any affirmative act indicating his consent to defendants’ work, and Supreme Court properly granted plaintiffs cross motion for summary judgment vacating the liens” (101 A.D.3d at 1226)

FACTUAL BACKGROUND

Plaintiff owned property involved in a proposed subdivision and denied requesting, hiring, approving, or consenting to defendants' professional services for the project. Although plaintiff attended some Planning Board meetings and knew that the purchase contract depended on governmental approvals, defendants could not identify any affirmative act by plaintiff requesting or consenting to their work, and their claims of consent were unsupported by documentary or other evidence.

PROCEDURAL HISTORY

Supreme Court granted plaintiff's cross motion for summary judgment, concluding that defendants' mechanics' liens were invalid because plaintiff had not requested or consented to defendants' services. Supreme Court also denied defendants' motion for renewal. The Appellate Division affirmed both orders, with costs, and noted that no appeal lies from the denial of a motion for reargument.

DISPOSITION

affirmed

CASES CITED

- Saratoga Assoc. Landscape Architects, Architects, Engrs. & Planners, P.C. v Lauter Dev. Group, 77 A.D.3d 1219 (2010)
- Tri-North Bldrs. v Di Donna, 217 A.D.2d 886 (1995)
- Care Sys. v Laramie, 155 A.D.2d 770 (1989)
- Alvarez v Prospect Hosp., 68 N.Y.2d 320 (1986)
- New York State Higher Educ. Servs. Corp. v Feher, 291 A.D.2d 736 (2002), lv dismissed and denied, 98 N.Y.2d 718 (2002)
- Huff v C.K. Sanitary Sys., 260 A.D.2d 892 (1999)
- 2 N. St. Corp. v Getty Saugerties Corp., 68 A.D.3d 1392 (2009), lv denied, 14 N.Y.3d 706 (2010)
- Johnson v Title N., Inc., 31 A.D.3d 1071 (2006)
- Greater Amsterdam School Dist. v International Fid. Ins. Co., 285 A.D.2d 944 (2001)
- Hoover v State of New York, 80 A.D.3d 1020 (2011)

OPINION

Creech v. Rufa 101 A.D.3d 1224

GARRY, J.

Garry, J. A mechanic's lien on real property is not valid unless the property owner or the owner's agent requested or consented to the lienor's services, and such consent must be shown by some affirmative act, and not merely by the owner's acquiescence or awareness (see Lien Law § 3; Saratoga Assoc. Landscape Architects, Architects, Engrs. & Planners, P.C. v Lauter Dev. Group, 77 AD3d 1219, 1220-1221 [2010]; Tri-North Bldrs. v Di Donna, 217 AD2d 886, 887 [1995]; Care Sys. v Laramie, 155 AD2d 770, 771 [1989]). Plaintiff supported his claim that he did not consent to defendants' work with his affidavit and deposition testimony asserting that he had no prior knowledge of the nature of their obligations to the buyers or the services they performed, that he did not hire them or agree to their work and that, although he attended some meetings of the Town Planning Board at Rufa's request, he was not asked to review, comment on or inspect defendants' work at these meetings or otherwise, never saw plans for the buyers' proposed development, and never spoke with the buyers about their plans for obtaining the

required approvals. Plaintiff further submitted the deposition testimony of defendants, who stated that they never spoke with plaintiff about their work, requested his input or approval, showed him plans, informed him of the work's progress or sought payment from him. We agree with Supreme Court that these submissions met plaintiffs burden to establish on a prima facie basis that he was entitled to judgment, shifting the burden to defendants to establish the existence of triable issues of fact (see *Alvarez v Prospect Hosp.*, 68 NY2d 320, 324 [1986]; *Saratoga Assoc. Landscape Architects, Architects, Engrs. & Planners, PC. v Lauter Dev. Group*, 77 AD3d at 1221; *TriNorth Bldrs. v Di Donna*, 217 AD2d at 887). Defendants did not meet that burden. Contrary to their claims, nothing more than plaintiffs awareness and acquiescence was established by his signature on the purchase contract, his deposition testimony that he knew that the contract was contingent on the government approvals, and his attendance at meetings of the Planning Board where the subdivision project was discussed. Defendants' claims to the effect that plaintiff knew of and consented to their professional services were wholly conclusory and unsupported by any documents or other evidence (see *New York State Higher Educ. Servs. Corp. v Feher*, 291 AD2d 736, 737-738 [2002], lv dismissed and denied 98 NY2d 718 [2002]; *Huff v C.K. Sanitary Sys.*, 260 AD2d 892, 896 [1999]). Accordingly, defendants failed to establish the existence of issues of fact as to whether plaintiff took any affirmative act indicating his consent to defendants' work, and Supreme Court properly granted plaintiffs cross motion for summary judgment vacating the liens (see *Saratoga Assoc. Landscape Architects, Architects, Engrs. & Planners, P.C. v Lauter Dev. Group*, 77 AD3d at 1221-1222; *Tri-North Bldrs. v Di Donna*, 217 AD2d at 887). Finally, Supreme Court properly denied defendants' motion for renewal.* Upon this motion, defendants submitted a certified copy of an application for review of a major subdivision that had been presented to the Planning Board in July 2006. This document did not constitute newly discovered evidence — defend*1227ants had produced it during plaintiffs March 2011 deposition and questioned him about it extensively. Nor was any justifiable excuse revealed for the failure to obtain a certified copy of this document until after the summary judgment order was rendered (see CPLR 2221 [e]; *2 N. St. Corp. v Getty Saugerties Corp.*, 68 AD3d 1392, 1396 [2009], lv denied 14 NY3d 706 [2010]; *Johnson v Title N., Inc.*, 31 AD3d 1071, 1072 [2006]; *Greater Amsterdam School Dist. v International Fid. Ins. Co.*, 285 AD2d 944, 945 [2001]). *Mercure, J.P., Lahtinen, Kavanagh and McCarthy, JJ., concur.* Ordered that the orders are affirmed, with costs. No appeal lies from the denial of a motion for reargument (see *Hoover v State of New York*, 80 AD3d 1020, 1020 [2011]).