

# THE CHRONICLE

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## Crystal Towers saga continues while fate of 200 residents remain in limbo

BY TEVIN STINSON  
THE CHRONICLE

In 2018 the Housing Authority of Winston-Salem (HAWS) announced the sale of Crystal Towers, the 11-story building that houses low-income senior citizens and individuals with disabilities, and almost immediately people from across the community raised concerns about where the residents would go. While the sale of the building still hasn't been finalized, HAWS has been busy working on ways to relocate the 200 residents who currently call Crystal Towers home.

Here's a recap of the ongoing Crystal Towers saga: In August of 2018, HAWS reported that the high rise located at 625 W. 6th Street, needed more than \$7 million in repairs and as a result, HAWS Board of Commissioners voted to approve the sale of the building. In March of 2019, The Chronicle reported that HAWS had made a decision on a buyer, but the contract had not been signed because the sale has to be approved by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).

When asked about Crystal Towers earlier this



Crystal Towers, located at 625 W. Sixth Street, is currently home to 200 residents.

Photo by Judie Holcomb - Pack

week, Kevin Cheshire, executive director of HAWS, said they are still waiting on approval from HUD and that there will be no transfer of ownership until every resident has been permanently relocated.

He said HAWS is in the process of hiring a "mobility specialist" to help residents find housing.

"The biggest thing is making sure we get a mo-

bility specialist to work with all of the Crystal residents," Cheshire said. "In the event that the disposition request is approved, we would have our mobility specialist work with all the residents in an intensive manner to try to ensure that we locate comparable alternative housing. Our primary objective first and foremost is that nothing proceeds with re-

spect to the sale until we are 100% convinced that 100% of the Crystal Towers residents have comparable alternative housing."

Because Crystal Towers is an income-based property, tenants are required to pay 30% of their gross adjusted income and HAWS provides a subsidy for the rest of their monthly rent. Once the sale is finalized, residents can

either relocate to another HAWS property or use a housing voucher to get an apartment on the private market.

Cheshire said HAWS will leverage some of the proceeds from the sale to create about 90 mixed-income multifamily replacement units in the downtown area, including 40 that will be true replacement units for resi-

dents from Crystal Towers. HAWS is expected to repurpose the Lowery Building (current HAWS Central Office) for the new units. The space is also expected to include retail space on the ground floor.

"It's going to be highly unlikely that we're going to be able to replace all 200 in what is currently considered as the downtown core, but we do think that it's realistic that all 200 will eventually be replaced in what will eventually be considered the downtown core," Cheshire continued. "We're losing 200 hard units. Now those individuals aren't losing their housing, we're going to make sure all 200 residents have housing. But we realize that bricks and mortar are being lost and we're going to try to build back as many of those units as possible ... so while we're not building back 200 immediately, we're building back what we think is a critical mass and we're putting them in a mixed-income environment where we're not warehousing low-income families, but we're putting those low-income families next to market rate residents or less subsidized

See Towers on A7

## New bill could add seats to city council

BY TEVIN STINSON  
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For the second time since 2019, state lawmakers are looking to get a bill passed that will add seats to the Winston-Salem City Council.

If House Bill 37 is passed, two at-large seats will be added to the city council. Currently, the city council operates with eight council members who are elected by ward and only the mayor is elected at large. HB 37, which was

filed by N.C. House Representative Donny Lambeth, comes less than two years after Lambeth filed a similar bill that received criticism from members of the council and the community and was later withdrawn.

Lambeth's original bill, HB 519, would've moved three of the eight council seats to at-large seats and given the mayor the right to vote in all city council matters. The bill would've also changed the way the council fills vacancies, and changed council member terms from four years to two years.

A press release issued from Lambeth's office after the bill was filed said adding at-large seats would bring city elections "more in line with other municipalities across the state." In the larger cities across the state, including Charlotte, Raleigh, Greensboro, and Durham, at least two council mem-



bers are elected at large.

Before HB 519 was tabled for a vote, Lambeth withdrew the bill and Mayor Allen Joiner agreed to form a non-partisan commission to review the best practices relative to the structure of the city council. Last March the commission voted 8-1 to recommend that the city change to a 10-member

council with eight members elected by wards and two elected citywide by all voters. Kismet Loftin-Bell, a professor at Forsyth Tech Community College, was the only member of the commission to vote against expanding.

When discussing her decision to vote against adding the at-large seats, Loftin-Bell said histori-

cally those seats are dominated by candidates with money. Loftin-Bell, who ran for a seat on the city council in 2018, said candidates vying for at-large seats have to reach out to more voters, which means campaigns are more expensive and essentially more challenging for a grassroots candidate. "Generally, in communi-

ties like Winston-Salem, oftentimes those who hold the wealth have the ability to run at-large campaigns," Loftin-Bell said.

The commission was tasked to look at what different communities in N.C. and across the country are doing with their city councils, Loftin-Bell said after looking at all the

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