

THE CHRONICLE

History | Heritage | Culture

Volume 47, Number 41

WINSTON-SALEM, N.C.

THURSDAY, August 12, 2021

Crystal Towers residents plead: 'Save our homes'

BY TEVIN STINSON
THE CHRONICLE

The residents of Crystal Towers have called on the City of Winston-Salem to use funds from the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) to make repairs to the 11-story public housing development located on West Sixth Street.

During a press conference held outside the building last week, residents and members of the local activist organization Housing Justice Now talked about the dreadful conditions inside the building, including rodents, roaches, bedbugs, faulty equipment, and little to no communication with management. In response they are asking the City of Winston-Salem to step in and spend \$7 million to make repairs to the building.

Crystal Towers is a public housing unit for seniors and those with disabilities and it's maintained by the Housing Authority of Winston-Salem (HAWS). HAWS announced the sale of the building located at 625 West Sixth Street, citing the need for \$7 million in repairs as the reason for the sale. A year later, The Chronicle reported that HAWS had made a decision on a buyer but they were waiting on approval from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).

Since then, Mayor Allen Joines and several members of the city council have said they don't approve of the sale because it would displace 200 people and reduce affordable housing opportuni-



Photo by Tevin Stinson

Last week tenants of Crystal Towers and Housing Justice Now held a press conference to ask the city to step in and make repairs to the 11-story public housing unit for seniors and those with disabilities.

ties in the downtown area. Phillip Carter, president of Housing Justice Now, said they received a letter from Councilmember Jeff MacIntosh saying the sale of Crystal Towers was textbook gentrification.

"We're hoping that he still feels the same way and that he will join forces with the mayor and other council members to come up with the money needed to make repairs to the building," Carter said.

Residents and their supporters suggested that the city use funding they received from the American Rescue Plan Act, which was signed into law by President Joe Biden

earlier this year, to make the repairs. The city is expected to receive \$51 million in ARPA funding.

Carter also suggested that the city make the repairs over time instead of spending \$7 million at one time. "It all doesn't have to be done at one time and that's why we believe the city should provide the funding to repair this building so the residents can continue to live in this community," Carter said.

When discussing the sale of Crystal Towers, Kevin Cheshire, executive director of HAWS, said there will be no transfer of ownership until every resident has been permanently

relocated. Once the sale is approved, HAWS will offer residents the option of moving into another one-bedroom apartment at another HAWS location or a voucher for a one-bedroom apartment, which can be privately owned or outside the city or state.

In February Cheshire said HAWS planned to use 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 residents 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.

HAWS is also considering using a portion of the proceeds from the sale to jumpstart stagnant redevelopment in the Happy Hill community.

No timetable has been set on when HAWS can expect the sale to be approved. Since there have been changes in administration since the original paperwork was filed with HUD, Cheshire said, "Honestly, I don't know where HUD is on this now, given the change in administration."

Following the press

conference last week, tenants and members of Housing Justice Now had a meeting with Mayor Joines in the lobby of Crystal Towers. Kathy Holland, who has called Crystal Towers home since 2018, said she wants to see the mayor take a tour of the building.

"I challenge the mayor to walk through the building ... there's rats, mold, rust, leaks ... the elevator is full of roaches right now," Holland said. "Don't just come into the lobby where they've cleaned everything up, really walk through the building and see the conditions we're being forced to live in."

District Attorney's Office launches DRIVE Program

BY TEVIN STINSON
THE CHRONICLE

Last week Forsyth County District Attorney Jim O'Neil announced the launch of DRIVE (Driver Restoration Initiative and Vocational Extension), a new program designed to

help residents get their license back.

The District Attorney's Office initially began a driver's license restoration program in 2015 with the purpose of giving the city's financially challenged or low-to-moderate income citizens an opportunity to have their driver's licenses restored. The program helped hundreds of people restore their licenses, until funding for it ended. O'Neil said when the program launched, they had no idea so many people were in need.

On the first day the program was offered in 2015, more than 200 people showed up.

"When people came back that we helped to



Photo by Tevin Stinson

Forsyth County District Attorney Jim O'Neil (left) fist bumps a participant in the DRIVE Program. The program helps residents get their license back.

show us their driver's license and there's tears coming out of their eyes it's a great feeling to know

that you can help somebody improve their way of life," O'Neil said.

The new Forsyth

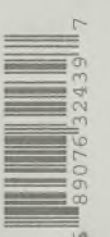
County DRIVE Program was made possible by a partnership with the City of Winston-Salem. Ac-

cording to O'Neil, about two years ago Councilman James Taylor, who is publisher of The Chronicle, reached out and wanted to help expand the program. To expand the program and help reach more people, last year city officials voted to allocate \$275,000 to fund the program. The funds will be used to pay staff for the program and marketing.

"I credit Councilman Taylor with understanding that if we had the resources, we could help that many more people in this community," O'Neil said. "He got everybody on board and everybody could immediately see the benefits of such an oppor-

See Drive on A8

www.wschronicle.com



019*007*****3-DIGIT 275
WTTXS-E-RES & SERIALS MGMT
DAVIS LIBRARY CB # 3938
PO BOX 8890
CHAPEL HILL, NC 27515-8890 90

WILSON
& CO.