Canton Decries 'Deplorable Conditions' Of Street In Ohio Named For Alan Page

April 21, 2018 at 3:58 pm · Filed Under: Alan Page, Minnesota Vikings, Ohio

CANTON, Ohio (AP) — The southeast street named for Pro Football Hall of Famer Alan Page has no road sign.

The road, which runs from Cherry Avenue SE to 17th Street SE, is bumpy and ends at a gate after meandering through Skyline Terrace Apartments.

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Twila Page, sister of Alan Page, said she decided to advocate for improvements after her nephew made a recent visit and was dismayed at what he found. On April 8, she emailed Mayor Thomas Bernabei, stating the street and neighborhood's condition "does not reflect the morals nor the values of one of Canton's famed black families."

Twila Page, who lives in Toledo, wrote the "deplorable conditions" of Alan Page Drive were in contrast to progress at the Johnson Controls Hall of Fame Village. She acknowledges it could take years of work to address blight and criminal activity, saying she simply seeks a commitment from the city toward improvement, without which they don't want Alan's name associated with the area.

"It can be done," she wrote the mayor.

On Monday, a city crew made some repairs on the street.

A NEPHEW'S VISIT

Christopher Page, Alan Page's nephew, said he visited his mother in Canton for Easter and wanted to show his fiancee the street with his surname.

"It was on April Fool's Day, and the joke was on me," he said.

Page first noticed the absence of a street sign. Then, he noticed the bumpy ride.

"It's probably one of the worst streets I've driven on, and I tour all over the country doing music," he said.

He said he did not speak on behalf of his uncle or the community, emphasizing his opinion of the street did not reflect on residents. As a visitor, though, it sent the wrong message.

"That's a telling sign of what the government thinks of the community of that street," he said.

ALAN PAGE'S LEGACY

In the early 1990s, Canton City Council renamed Highland Park Drive SE for the 1988 Pro Football Hall of Fame inductee.

Page, who grew up in southeast Canton, played defensive tackle for the Minnesota Vikings and Chicago Bears over 15 seasons. He pursued a legal career that began before his NFL retirement in 1981 and was the first black justice elected to the Minnesota Supreme Court in 1992. Page served until 2015, when he turned the court's mandatory retirement age of 70.

Page, then assistant attorney general for Minnesota, attended the street naming ceremony and called it "as great and as big an honor as any that I've had." He told the nearly 150 people gathered he hoped his name inspired others in the low-income neighborhood to achieve their dreams.

Messages left for Alan Page seeking comment for this article were not returned.

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CITY'S RESPONSE

Mayor Thomas Bernabei attended the street-naming ceremony more than two decades ago as Canton's law director, according to The Repository archives.

He responded to Twila Page's email April 14. In his note, Bernabei stated Canton is proud to be home of the Pro Football Hall of Fame and of Alan Page's accomplishments.

"Unfortunately, the tangible benefits of the Hall do not necessarily translate into well-being for many portions of our city," he wrote, adding that areas outside city limits often see more revenue from hotel stays and tourist activities.

Bernabei stated the conditions along Alan Page Drive are similar to those in many of the city's older, poorer neighborhoods.

"Public safety and streets are two of the highest if not the highest responsibilities of local government to our citizens," he wrote. "We have difficulty stretching our budget every year to provide these (and many other services)."

Poverty, however, is the root of many "social ills" and beyond the ability of local government to solve, Bernabei stated. He told Twila Page the potholes would be filled Monday — they were — and invited her and her brother to discuss solutions that don't involve name removal.

Both Bernabei, in his email, and Councilwoman Chris Smith, D-4, who spoke to The Repository, said Page's concerns illustrate the need to increase city revenue. They referenced Issue 13, a May 8 ballot measure that would raise Canton's income tax from 2 percent to 2.5 percent.

Most of the revenues generated by the additional 0.5 percent tax would help implement the comprehensive plan, which recommended investing in key areas and neighborhoods. Then, 20 percent would go to the general fund, 10 percent to the capital fund and 50 percent to a neighborhood development fund.

Smith, whose ward encompasses Alan Page Drive, said potholes can be found throughout the city, and the street's condition is not intentional.

"It wasn't no type of personal neglect or anything like that," she said.

Neither she nor the mayor knew of the absent street sign or how long a banner featuring Alan Page has hung on a utility pole near the Cherry Avenue SE entrance.

STREET'S FUTURE

Jimmy Arnold, president of the Texas-based Eureka Multifamily Group, which purchased Skyline Terrace about five years ago, said he was not aware of any unhappiness with the street or area. The property management company cares for the complex, which offers low-income families rent subsidized by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

"We're proud that the street is named that, and it's disappointing that someone feels otherwise," Arnold said.

Twila Page said she wanted to bring attention to the southeast neighborhood, which has a connection to the Hall of Fame but receives disproportionately the city's annual festivities. She visits Canton a few times a year, she said, but at no time recently has she visited the street named for her brother because of how frequently it appears in crime reports.

Records from the Canton Police Department show officers responded to Alan Page Drive 1,074 times in 2015, 453 times in 2016 and 890 times in 2017. The Repository reported in 2017 two men were shot, one fatally, in separate incidents, and a pizza delivery man was robbed at the apartment complex.

Last year was Canton's deadliest year on record with 17 homicides. After several shootings by early summer, the city assigned four police officers to extra patrols.

Page said she hopes Canton leaders improve the quality of life for Skyline Terrace residents. She set no time frame for change, but says she knows one thing: "It can't go on like it is, that's for certain."

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Rep. Kaptur requests investigation into hazardous Toledo apartment complex

Local leaders are working to see how they can clean up a Toledo apartment complex causing health and safety hazards for its residents, and calling for an invest

By WTVG Staff
Published: Sep. 23, 2021 at 7:23 PM CDT

TOLEDO, Ohio (WTVG) - Local leaders are working to see how they can clean up a Toledo apartment complex causing health and safety hazards for its residents while calling for an investigation.

People living at the Greenbelt Place Apartments tell 13abc the complex is falling apart. It's riddled with mold and trash, even infested with bed bugs. Some apartments have leaking ceilings, broken lights, and broken smoke detectors.

Residents spoke to 13abc on the condition of anonymity out of fear of losing their housing.

"People Live here. We pay our rent," one resident said. "So why can't our apartments be up to date?"

After 13abc's report on Thursday, Congresswoman Marcy Kaptur (D) is now getting involved, requesting an investigation by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).

"The full weight of inspection and enforcement actions available to protect the residents at Greenbelt Place Apartments from the perils of absentee property ownership must be brought to bear for the residents and for the community at large," said Kaptur in a statement.

She said the investigation will seek to assess the health and safety concerns brought forth by residents, as well as make a plan to fix the problems.

13abc spoke with a new manager at the complex, who told us to call the corporate offices. The Greenbelt Place Apartment complex is owned by Eurekka Holdings located in Austin, Texas. It has not yet responded to requests for comment.

We also reached out to HUD, the agency responsible for subsidizing the residents' rent with taxpayer money. It has not yet responded to requests for comment.

Tina Butts, a lead organizer with the grassroots organization The Movement, said city and county leaders visited the complex two weeks ago to hear from the residents. Butts said they were appalled by the conditions there and took photo documentation.

"We need to stand up to them and say 'No, these are demands,'" Butts said. "In order for y'all to come in here instead of businesses and draw money out of here that these are the demands and the conditions that our kids need to have and live in."

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LOCAL COUNTY
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Apartment managers hurrying to beat HUD deadline

Contractors arrived at the Greenbelt Place Apartments Friday with just nine days to fix a long list of issues.

Congresswoman Marcy Kaptur has requested a HUD inspection of a Toledo apartment complex.

By Alexis Meyers
Published: Sep. 24, 2021 at 5:54 PM CDT

TOLEDO, Ohio (WTVG) - The managers of a Toledo apartment complex are now working to clean up the property after Rep. Marcy Kaptur (D - Ohio) requested an onsite investigation by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

Speaking to 13abc, residents of Greenbelt Place Apartments say the building is infested with cockroaches and bed bugs and is plagued by mold and other issues.

Following 13abc's original story on Thursday, contractors showed up at the apartment complex to begin working on those issues. Residents were also given a letter from the apartment managers informing them of a HUD inspection on October 4 and 5. One of the newly arrived workers told 13abc they had been hired to bring the property up to living standards and had been given just nine days to do so. The workers now have just over a week to fix broken sliding doors, missing air units, and electrical outlets.

So far, residents say nothing has been done about the pest problem, though the contractors did remove railings. "We need help on the inside, where we live at," says Maria Gonzales. "The outside is OK but I feel like they're doing the outside work for y'all. Not for us."

Residents shared pictures of mold in their bathtubs, their furnaces, and water-damaged ceilings.

"The upstairs bathroom looks like it's going to fall in the downstairs bathroom. It's also leaking downstairs in the bathroom as well," says one mother who is worried for her 1-year-old child.

13abc has learned that a company offered to buy the property from Eureka Holdings, but according to emails we've obtained, the owners have denied that request four times.

City and county leaders, as well as Rep. Kaptur, are all on board to help the residents. Now, Sen. Sherrod Brown has thrown his hat into the ring, issuing a statement on Friday that read, in part, "We was told HUD is engaging with property managers to ensure improvements to conditions there. Senator Brown and his office will continue to advocate to ensure residents have access to safe, high-quality housing.

13abc reached out to Eureka Holdings, requesting a comment. In response, a spokesperson for the company requested we hold this story until someone could reach out.

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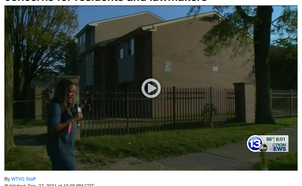
Planned HUD inspection of Greenbelt Apts. raises concerns for residents and lawmakers



By WTVG Staff
Published: Sep. 27, 2021 at 10:39 PM CDT

TOLEDO, Ohio (WTVG) - Rep. Marcy Kaptur says the city of Toledo needs to hold the owners of Greenbelt Apartments accountable after residents received letters instructing them to clean up their homes ahead of an inspection by the Housing and Urban Development Department.

"We will check with this and make sure the residents are treated with respect. The only way you ever fix a home or a multi-family complex or neighborhood is by working together. It sounds to me based on what you said that HUD isn't taking that approach and we can fix that," Kaptur said. "Eureka Holdings is a Texas-based company. So they don't live here they don't care about us. This is not the first time that Greenbelt has been cited and in the past HUD has come to that site and now they are again."

The inspection is scheduled for next week. Residents were told to outline their concerns, take pictures and inform their city council members.

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Greenbelt Place Apartments ruled nuisance property by City of Toledo

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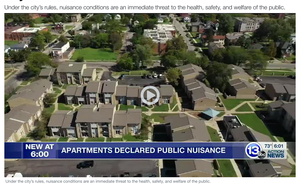

Under the city's rules, nuisance conditions are an immediate threat to the health, safety, and welfare of the public.

By Tricia Ennis
Published: Sep. 28, 2021 at 11:22 AM CDT | Updated: Sep. 28, 2021 at 11:26 AM CDT

TOLEDO, Ohio (WTVG) - The City of Toledo has officially declared an embattled property a nuisance. The city's Department of Neighborhoods, as well as the Commissioner of the Division of Code Enforcement, made that declaration on September 22, ruling that the Greenbelt Place Apartments met the conditions for the ruling.

Under the city's rules, nuisance conditions are an immediate threat to the health, safety, and welfare of the public. As part of the ruling, the property owners were required to correct the violations noted in the filing within 72 hours or be subject to possible criminal and civil charges. The owners could also request a hearing to determine whether the nuisance ruling is appropriate within that time.

13abc has been following the story of the Greenbelt Place Apartments since last week, when residents lodged a laundry list of complaints against the property's owners, claiming that the apartment complex was in disrepair and infested with mold and pests. In the inspection report attached to the order, the inspector noted junk and debris on the property, as well as inoperable vehicles, tires, and furniture outside. The report also orders the repair or replacement of windows, doors, overhangs, siding, gutters, steps, railings, sidewalks, and other exterior pieces of the structure.

Rep. Marcy Kaptur (D-OH) requested an inspection by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development which has been scheduled for late next week. The property owners, meanwhile, have scrambled to fix those issues ahead of that inspection. Contractors arrived at the building on Friday to begin making repairs, though residents told 13abc that those repairs had so far been cosmetic. The contractors were given just nine days to get the property up to code.

▷ ✕

"Eureka cares about providing safe, affordable housing to our tenants," said Jennifer Guerrera, VP of Affordable Housing for Eureka Multifamily Group, who owns the property. "The Greenbelt Place Apartments received a high passing score from our most recent HUD inspection and the next regularly scheduled inspection will be conducted next week. A maintenance crew has already been on property addressing tenant concerns and will remain on property addressing concerns. Eureka has made long-standing efforts to immediately address any trouble tickets submitted to our maintenance team. As always, Eureka will continue to work with HUD, city officials, and our tenants to address any concerns."

Rep. Kaptur, meanwhile, has sent a letter to the president of the Austin, TX based company, requesting an in-person meeting between him and the residents. The letter says, in part: "While the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and the City of Toledo undertake separate, parallel investigations and inspections of the complex, we ask that you make yourself available for an in-person meeting at Greenbelt Place with residents, local stakeholders, and my office during the week of Monday, October 4, 2021."

City leaders want you to report any and all issues to the HUD office immediately. The number is 877-506-3552. You will also need the property ID number #800017009.

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Eric Robinson's web site can be accessed 24/7 at www.toledo.oh.gov

09/22/2021
Case #C021-00917
VIOLATION LETTER
13 1ER PUBLIC NUISANCE ORDER: TNC 1734.08 (a)
Property location: 800 CHERRY ST, TOLEDO 43604

1ROPERATION SYSTEM CO 2013 TOLEDO CHERRY STREET, LLC
4400 EASTON COMMONS WAY, SUITE 125
COLUMBUS , OH 43219

An inspection of the above listed property was conducted on or about 09/22/2021.
Emergency Conditions were observed and recorded.
An examination of the Lucas County Auditor's Records shows that you are the Record Owner/lessee of the property and premises of this violation location.
You are hereby notified, pursuant to Section 1734.02 of the Toledo Municipal Code, that the above property has been declared a nuisance by the Chief of Neighborhoods, Commissioner of Code Enforcement, and that the conditions on the above property are ordered to be cured. There is no REASON THE NUISANCE CONDITIONS THAT EXIST AT THIS PROPERTY ARE AN IMMEDIATE THREAT TO THE

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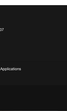

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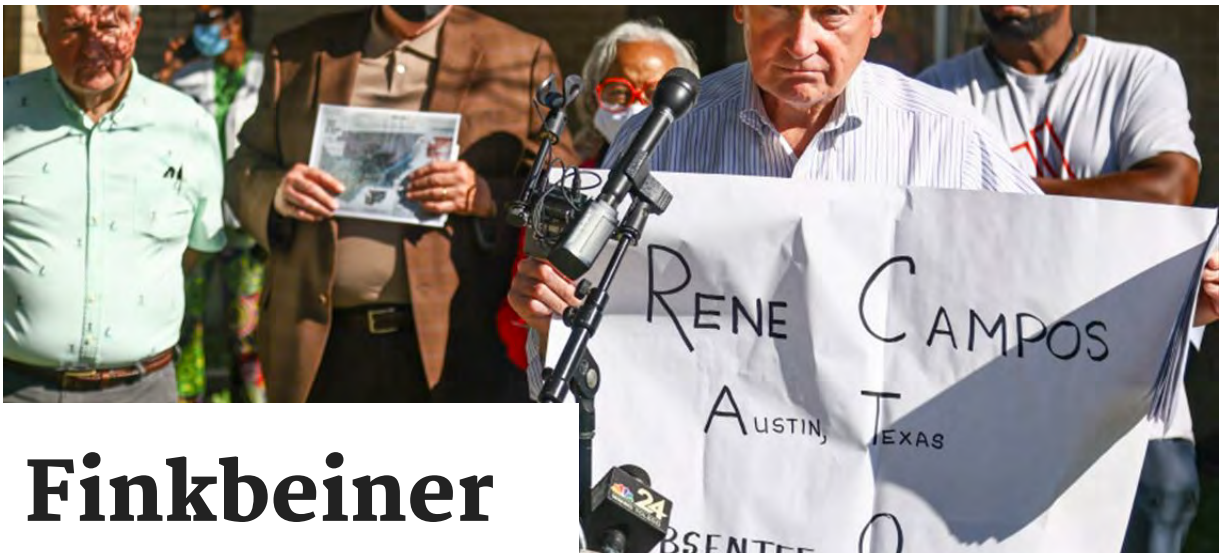

Finkbeiner calls on Greenbelt owners to fix issues at nuisance property

SEP 29, 2021 | 7:01 PM

Calling for the out-of-state owner of a subsidized apartment complex near downtown

Toledo to step forward and address some of its issues, mayoral candidate Carty Finkbeiner described living conditions as untenable and warned children are living in a “war zone.”

City officials declared the Greenbelt Apartments on Cherry Street — owned by Dallas-based company Eureka Holdings, Inc., which operates its lone Toledo business under an LLC called 2013 Toledo Cherry Street — a public nuisance property Tuesday after inspectors found

multiple city code violations including junk, debris, trash, and litter; inoperable or unlicensed vehicles; tires, and furniture outside.

Speaking in front of the complex Wednesday, Mr. Finkbeiner, a former Toledo mayor who's challenging incumbent Wade Kapszukiewicz, said crime in the area has spiraled out of control and questioned the city's urgency to address residents' living conditions.

"This is serious. This is very serious," the former three-term mayor

said. "What is going on? And why is it not being attacked aggressively by the city of Toledo until Marcy Kaptur got involved a week ago?"

Mr. Finkbeiner placed the majority of his focus of the news conference on Eureka, and specifically the company's managing partner, Rene Campos.

"This man is going to be tracked down because he's ducking and he's dodging," Mr. Finkbeiner said while holding a a sign that read "Rene Campos, Austin, Texas, absentee owner."

Mr. Campos “has let this complex become a war zone, showing no interest whatsoever,” said Mr. Finkbeiner, who plans to meet with Greenbelt residents next Wednesday and called on Eureka to provide answers for why conditions have become unlivable at the complex.

“Rene Campos must respond to [the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development], our congresswoman, the city of Toledo, but most importantly, those that live here in this

complex including the children," Mr. Finkbeiner said, vowing that he would fly to Texas to find Mr. Campos if necessary. "...We need to get the guy who owns this property and hold him accountable. And we will."

Neither Mr. Campos nor a spokesman for the company immediately responded to a request for comment Wednesday, nor did the Kapszukiewicz administration.

In a written statement to The Blade on Tuesday following news of the city's

declaration of Greenbelt as a nuisance property, Jennifer Guerra, vice president of affordable housing for Eureka Multifamily Group, a subsidiary of Eureka Holdings, Inc., said the company “cares about providing safe, affordable housing” to its tenants.

Ms. Guerra pointed to a “high passing score” Greenbelt received from HUD at its most recent inspection and said a maintenance crew had been on-site addressing tenant concerns and would

continue to do so. Another federal inspection is scheduled for next week.

Deante Rivers, a 22-year-old University of Toledo student who lives in the complex, said the shootings, drug problems, and overall violence at Greenbelt have become “out of control.”

“My biggest concern is for our youth,” he said. “...These kids go to school every day and they have to put on the trauma that they endure at this place every day and live with that. And they don’t really have a

say."

Tina Butts, founder of The Movement, a grassroots coalition aimed at vaccinating the public, was working to get people signed up to receive the vaccine earlier this month when she saw Greenbelt Place in person, describing its conditions as "horrible."

"We were jumping around because there was bed bugs all over, and they were showing us all the rats and mice that were trying to eat through the apartments, it was just horrible," she recalled. "...It's

just so depressing. You have grandmas sitting on the porch, they're scared. We got photos of people that don't even live over there. If the residents that live there call the police, they end up getting shot up."

Ms. Butts reached out to Ms. Kaptur, who involved HUD in the situation.

The city's nuisance orders include the trash and debris issues for which corrective action was required within 72 hours, while the other gives Eureka 30 days to make an extensive list of building repairs. Failure to

comply with either could lead to civil or criminal charges.

If further action is taken and residents are in threat of displacement, Lucas Metropolitan Housing is preparing to provide relief, said Joaquin Cintron Vega, its president and chief executive officer. Though LMH does not own Greenbelt and any decision on tenant placement would come from HUD, the agency is prepared to offer tenant protection vouchers should it become necessary, Mr. Vega said.

"We are here to serve and we are going to do whatever may be necessary within the resources that we manage and the resources that we have to help those residents," he said. "But we are just watching closely to see how this develops and we are going to keep having communication with city officials, the county commissioners, Marcy Kaptur's office, and HUD to make sure that if and when the time comes, we can be ready to hit the ground running."

First Published September 29,

2021, 5:57pm

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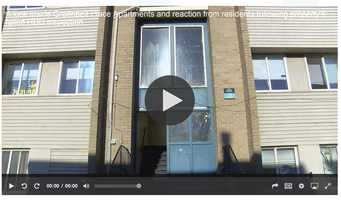
Greenbelt Place Apartments management says repairs will be made within 30 days

The city of Toledo and U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development mandated certain improvements after the complex failed a nuisance inspection.



Author: Jay Skebba
Published: 4:56 PM EDT October 29, 2021
Updated: 4:56 PM EDT October 29, 2021

TOLEDO, Ohio — *Editor's note: The attached video aired Oct. 8, 2021.*

Parties involved in making necessary repairs to the Greenbelt Place Apartments say work is on track to be completed within 30 days.

Apartment representatives met this week with city officials, about three weeks after the complex failed a nuisance inspection, according to a release sent to media. All improvements are expected to be made by the end of November, but supply chain bottlenecks could add time to the project.

"We are working right now on making the necessary repairs identified by the city," said Rene Campos, general managing partner of Austin, Texas-based Eureka Holdings, the owner of the complex. "We will communicate with the city's code enforcement division throughout the process and look forward to stabilizing the property where our residents live."

The management team is also coordinating social services work for residents, including temporary relocation for eligible residents. Management is also working with the Toledo Police Department to improve safety and security.

"Under no circumstances will we allow Greenbelt Place Apartments to deteriorate further, and we thank the mayor and his team for their commitment and guidance in helping us to complete our rehabilitation work as quickly as possible," Campos said.

An inspection of the Greenbelt Place Apartments led to a 72-hour public nuisance order filed by the Toledo Department of Neighborhoods, dated Sept. 22. According to the letter, the conditions of the property at 800 Cherry St. in north Toledo "are an immediate threat to the health, safety or welfare of the public."

The city ordered certain fixes to be made within 30 days based on its inspection from last week.

In eight pages of inspection by the city's code enforcement inspector found that the Greenbelt Place Apartments had the violations of:

- Junk, debris, trash and litter on property
- Inoperable/unlicensed vehicle(s) including trailers on property
- Tires on property
- Interior furniture on the exterior of the building
- Repairs or replacement needed for: overhangs, brick sidewalks, doors, windows, railings, steps/stairs, siding, gutters/spouts, fencing

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development is also involved in the process and mandated certain repairs.

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Chrissy Suttles
Beaver County Times

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Tamika Lee with Beaver County United on Wednesday, urged Towne Towers residents to start a claim with Neighborhood Legal Services and withhold their rent until property owners address 'unlivable conditions' at the 434 Franklin Ave. building. *Lucy Schaly/BCT*

ALIQUIPPA — Iris Jackson says she hasn't had reliable heat in six days as frigid air continues to grip western Pennsylvania.

That's par for the course at downtown Aliquippa's Towne Towers, the longtime tenant said, as is rampant flooding, pests and mold.

Jackson, using her walker for support, joined Beaver County United activists on Wednesday demanding property owners address "unlivable conditions" at the century-old 434 Franklin Ave. building.

Such conditions, Jackson said, include unpredictable heating in the winter, inadequate air conditioning in the summer, flooding due to unrepaired pipes, water-damaged ceilings, rodent infestations and broken elevators.

The rodent infestation has led to feces and urine in the halls and ceilings, residents reported at the rally. Mold and mildew are often spotted throughout the 60-unit building that houses a number of low-income renters, including older adults with disabilities.

Iris Jackson, of Aliquippa, tells Aliquippa Code Enforcement Officer Jim Bologna about the "deplorable" state of Towne Towers at Wednesday's rally. *Chrissy Suttles/BCT*

Speaking outside of the Aliquippa City Building, Jackson said property managers are abusing their power and ignoring renters' complaints.

"No one should have to go without heat in the middle of winter," Jackson said. "As tenants, we have rights. Rats...I almost sat on one. I killed another in my kitchen; I have urine and feces coming down my ceiling from 2020 that's still not fixed."

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Towne Towers is owned by Texas-based Eureka Multifamily Group, which also owns Valley Terrace Apartments in Aliquippa. The company on its website touts a range of amenities at both properties, including "individually controlled central air and heating." Calls made to the building's office and Eureka leadership were not immediately returned Wednesday.

"I think tenants should withhold their rent until housing fixes their situation," said Tamika Lee with Beaver County United, urging residents to start a claim with Neighborhood Legal Services. "If you are paying your rent, there is no reason you shouldn't be able to access your building. Forcing tenants to pay rent in unlivable conditions like this is violent, and management needs to be held accountable for neglecting their tenants while taking their money."

Property owners and landlords are facing widespread scrutiny throughout the region for their sluggish response to heating interruptions as temperatures plummet.

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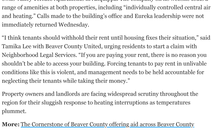

Towne Towers, at 434 Franklin Ave. in Aliquippa, is over 100 years old. *Lucy Schaly/BCT*

State laws governing landlords are sometimes hard to enforce. The Pennsylvania Supreme Court in the 1970s established the "implied warranty of habitability" that entitles renters to a safe, habitable home. This, in part, requires landlords to make non-cosmetic repairs that would otherwise put lives or welfare at risk, including lack of running water and inadequate heat in the winter.

Landlords are also typically responsible for eliminating insect or rodent infestations and fixing substantial leaks. What's considered "adequate" heat in a rental unit is often determined at the municipal level, according to the Housing Equality Center of Pennsylvania.

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The city "isn't sitting idly by," said Aliquippa Mayor Dwan Walker and Aliquippa Code Enforcement Officer Jim Bologna, but because the building is privately owned and receives Section 8 funding from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, their influence is "limited."

"The city has been fighting," Walker said. He and Bologna have met with HUD officials and property owners to work toward a solution, they said.

Inspectors with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's multifamily northeast region in October issued a formal notice to Eureka, citing ownership for failing to meet safety and sanitation standards required to receive housing assistance payments.

Inspectors identified "serious deficiencies," including electrical hazards and safety issues. Management must correct these deficiencies to pass their next inspection in October of this year, Walker said, and give progress reports every 90 days

More: Rochester Manor and Villa says building was never 'without heat'

A broken window is seen from below Aliquippa's Towne Towers on Wednesday. *Lucy Schaly/BCT*

"At this point, we will hold HUD accountable," Walker said. His advice to residents was to document and report all disrepair to him, HUD and managers – and keep a copy for themselves.

Bologna said he's seen some improvements made during regular walkthroughs of the building's common area, stressing that ownership has committed to replacing both elevators for $800,000 and upgrading the carpet. He's worried residents will be displaced if Eureka loses its HUD assistance, and hopes all parties can work together amicably.

"I was there yesterday and we went through a lot of stuff," he said. "This time of year, pipes are breaking left and right. It's an old building."

Still, the conditions at Towne Towers "are regularly risking lives, and have been for some time," activists said repeatedly on Wednesday.

"It's time to get these people some real help," said Lashawn Clancy with Beaver County United. "And fast."

***Chrissy Suttles** covers business, energy and environment for the Beaver County Times and the USAToday Network. Contact her at csuttles@gannett.com and follow her on Twitter @ChrissySuttles.*

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NEWS

City code enforcement officer and fire chief to investigate Towne Towers

Nicholas Vercilla Beaver County Times
Published 4:00 p.m. ET Feb. 1, 2021 | Updated 6:03 p.m. ET Feb. 3, 2022

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Aliquippa's code enforcement officer and fire chief will be investigating the conditions of Towne Towers. Lucy Schaly-RCT

ALIQUIPPA — City Code Enforcement/Zoning Officer Jim Bologna will have a meeting with the upper management and residents of Towne Towers on Feb. 4.

Bologna said he will also be visiting the apartments of the building.

The building, which is owned by Texas-based Eureka Multifamily Group, and receives funding from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), has received complaints from tenants who state there is a lack of heat, flooding, rodent infestations, mold, and more.

More: 'We have rights': Renters protest 'unlivable' conditions at Aliquippa's Towne Towers

City Solicitor Myron Sainovich said even though the building is a private enterprise, Bologna is allowed to visit and investigate the building through his certified role as a code and zoning inspector.

Bologna said he and other city officials have been keeping up with the news and complaints made by the occupants from the building.

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He said one of the elevators is currently down due to a safety cable issue, stating it should be back up and running by Feb. 8.

Bologna also said the management has put in a deposit for a new elevator, and has painted and put new carpeting in the common area of the building.

City Fire Chief David Foringer said he has concerns over holes in the maintenance area of the building, stating they are a significant safety hazard, and said if a fire were to break out there, it would cause the whole building, which is over 100 years old, to go up in flames.

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Bologna said when he reached out to management about the holes, they claimed they had no answer for them.

Therefore, council asked Foringer to come and look at the building on Friday as well from a fire safety perspective.

When asked if the building has a fire evacuation plan, Foringer said the fire department attempted to have a fire drill two years ago, and only three tenants participated.

He said the department can assist the building's management team with coming up with a fire evacuation plan, with Sainovich stating he will check HUD regulations to see if there are any safety mandates that need to be in place if they aren't already.

Mayor Dwan Walker said due to the building receiving Section 8 funding through HUD, the city is limited to what they can do to help.

He said they are waiting for a HUD report to come back regarding the building, and said he wants to keep HUD informed regarding the conditions at the building.

Bologna said it is only a matter of time until HUD comes to inspect the building. He said if the building fails inspection again, HUD will shut the building down, forcing the occupants out of their homes, left to find new housing on their own.

He added for any tenant at Towne Towers, as well as Valley Terrace Apartments, which is also owned by Eureka, if they see anything wrong or broken in the buildings, to document and report it.

"They have to document everything," Walker said.

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Nicholas Vercilla is a staff reporter for the Beaver County Times. He can be reached at nvercilla@gannett.com. Staff reporter Chrissy Suttles contributed to this report.

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Tenants At Aliquippa Apartment Building Say They Are Living In Filthy Conditions

Several tenants say it is a cycle of never-ending problems.

By Jennifer Borrasso May 25, 2021 at 11:45 pm Filed Under: Aliquippa, Beaver County, Jennifer Borrasso, Local TV

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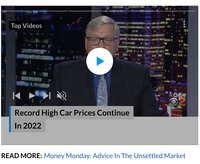
ALIQUIPPA, Pa. (KDKA) — Tenants of an apartment building in Aliquippa are fed up and want change.

Residents of Towne Tower Apartments say they are living in filth and have issues with electricity and elevators not working.



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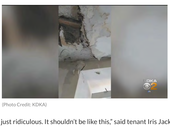
Eureka Multifamily Group, a Texas-based company, owns the apartment building. A spokesperson told KDKA's Jennifer Borrasso that a breaker blew and was replaced. KDKA learned this is not the first time there have been problems in the apartment building.



(Photo Credit: KDKA)

"It's just ridiculous. It shouldn't be like this," said tenant Iris Jackson.

The apartment complex on Franklin Avenue in Aliquippa has residents calling for change. They say there are electrical, air conditioning, plumbing and water issues.

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"It's very bad," said tenant Melissa Henderson. "The elevators are not working right. The lights are consistently out."

"At night, you can hear some of the pipes breaking off," Jackson added.

Aliquippa police say they respond frequently to the apartment complex.

"I think they are dealing with some deplorable conditions," said Police Officer Dico D'Arrigo. "Complaining about urine in the elevators, the elevators not working, things of that nature have been going on for a while."

Eureka Multifamily Group told KDKA that the electricity is working, but several tenants say it is a cycle of never-ending problems.

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"They should care more about taking care of the tenants," Jackson said.

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Tenants at Aliquippa senior high-rise suffer in heat without air conditioning

Tenants in senior high-rise tenants suffer in heat without A/C

Updated: 6:41 PM EDT May 29, 2018

Sheldon Ingram
Reporter

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ALIQUIPPA, Pa. — The air conditioning system was turned on Tuesday to cool off a hot apartment building full of senior citizens.

On Monday, tenants fled their apartments in Towne Tower to seek relief from sweltering heat because the air conditioning system wasn't working.

Towne Tower is owned by Eureka Multifamily Group, which is based in Texas.

A regional director, based in Beaver County, told Pittsburgh's Action News 4 that the air conditioning system was programmed to start at the beginning of May but, last week, the system began to leak leak and required a rebuilt part. The contractor who was scheduled to fix the system on Friday didn't show up until Tuesday morning.

The temperature inside George Henderson Jr.'s apartment was 95 degrees at midday. "If we could do better being in a hotel, that would be understandable but, right now, we have to suffer through it.It'sture," he said.

Other tenants said this will be the fourth consecutive year without air conditioning, regardless of complaints to management.

Towne Tower Apartments is a five-story building with 60 units on Franklin Avenue.

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NEWS

Residents at East Austin apartment to be relocated after 34 days without gas, hot water, heat

Luz Moreno-Lazaro
Austin American-Statesman

Published 5:00 a.m. CT March 19, 2021 | Updated 3:02 p.m. CT March 25, 2021

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Craft leaders and others gather at Mount Carmel Village Apartments on Wednesday March 24, 2021, to pray for residents who have been without gas for more than a month. Jay Janner / American-Statesman

Austin-area faith leaders led a prayer service outside East Austin's Mount Carmel Village apartments on Wednesday as residents marked Day 34 of no gas, just days before residents face a Friday deadline to move out because of the lack of hot water and heat.

On Feb. 20, after enduring a week of subfreezing temperatures that left many without water and electricity, the 100-unit affordable housing complex lost gas after a resident reported a strong odor, prompting the gas company to shut off the gas to the entire property.

Since then, residents have been without heat and hot water, and the ability to cook on the units' gas range stoves.

Dallas-based property owners Eureka Multifamily Group, who own several other properties along East 12th Street in East Austin, said the freezing weather exacerbated problems by causing the ground to shift, which then caused the underground gas main to form multiple leaks.

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Leslie Jaramillo, Mount Carmel property manager, said that after weeks of work pulling permits, conducting various pressurized testing, and coordinating with multiple agencies and vendors, the complex was advised to replace the entire underground gas pipeline, which they said could take up to six days to do.

For the past few weeks, the complex has been offering free breakfasts and lunches, portable showers, electric skillets, and hotel stays.

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But residents are now being asked to temporarily leave their homes, after Austin's Code Department said the property had no hot water (colder than 110 degrees) and no heat (room temperature colder than 68 degrees), both of which were caused by the lack of gas. Property management has submitted their action plan, and the city will be ensuring the actions are being fulfilled.

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As of Monday, Jennifer Guerra, vice-president of affordable housing for the Eureka Multifamily Group, said her company has brought in an expert relocation provider, endorsed by the Housing Authority of the city of Austin.

"As soon as housing options are found with the help of the relocation specialist, residents will relocate," Guerra said. "The team will conduct personal interviews with tenants to reaffirm relocation needs and special requirements related to temporary relocation."

Guerra did not provide a specific deadline but said the hope is to place residents in safe, clean and sanitary housing as soon as possible.

However, Tamiqwa Brewster, who has lived in the complex nearly 15 years, and several of her neighbors said they were told all residents have to be out by Friday, and many still have questions. She said residents were told to pack clothes and toiletries and any other necessities, but that other household items like furniture and kitchen utensils could remain.

Brewster said residents, who formed a tenants council last week, just want to know how Eureka will secure the items left behind in their homes, and how often they will be allowed to come back to check mail and do routine chores like laundry. She also said several repairs need to be done inside the apartments, so she wondered why a full remodeling wouldn't be done, especially if they are expecting if they are expecting gas repairs to take three months.

Many residents also told the American-Statesman they felt like Eureka was not being completely honest and were planning to permanently push people out.

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"This situation has affected our lives in every way," Brewster said. "Emotionally we are drained and we need a solution. We want to talk to Eureka and get some answers."

Austin Council Member Natasha Harper-Madison, whose district includes Mount Carmel Village, has raised concerns about the lack of gas with the apartment's management and the gas company.

She assured residents that the relocation was only temporary and that the building had no plans for condemnation or to be purchased or bulldozed through eminent domain.

"They cannot take your apartment away," Harper-Madison said.

Harper-Madison said she is working to get residents a meeting with Eureka, and doing everything she can to get resident's concerns and questions answered.

On Wednesday, more than a dozen faith leaders led a prayer service outside the complex's main office and then went door to door to pray with residents in their homes, something that Christina Muhammad, who organized the event, said residents were going without. Muhammad works with the 10,000 Fearless First Responders, a humanitarian organization led by volunteers and guided by its community's needs.

"I've seen people bringing water, food and toiletries, but what I haven't seen is prayer," Christina said. "So, we asked our faith community to come together and pray for these residents at a time when so many are frustrated and hurting."

"We were concerned about residents living in conditions without resources and that is making their home unlivable," Nation of Islam Minister Robert Muhammad said, adding that the leaders were "trying to do what we can to help outside of calling on management and city leaders to fix this."

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"We know they have endured pain and hurt with this situation and we want them to know the spiritual community cares," he said.

Residents welcomed the prayer but many are still frustrated as they pack their possessions in preparation to move.

"We always welcome prayer," Brewster said. "It took a little bit of anger away, but it's frustrating still. We just want answers."

Robert Muhammad, left, minister of Muhammad Mosque No. 14 and Rashad Muhammad, and Austin Police Department chaplains Cassie Shaw Burns and Eli McDonald pray for residents of Mount Carmel Village Apartments who have been without gas for more than a month on Wednesday March 24, 2021. Jay Janner / American-Statesman

Previous Coverage: East Austin apartment complex still without gas one month after Texas freeze

Workers repair gas lines at Mount Carmel Village Apartments in East Austin, where residents have been without gas for more than a month on Wednesday. Jay Janner / American-Statesman

Austin City Council Member Natasha Harper-Madison, right, talks to Beatrice Torres, a resident of Mount Carmel Village Apartments who has been without gas for more than a month on Wednesday March 24, 2021. Jay Janner/American-Statesman

Rev. Robert Maddox, of Simpson United Methodist Church, prays for Lenese Gage, a resident of Mount Carmel Village Apartments who has been without gas for more than a month on Wednesday March 24, 2021. Jay Janner / American-Statesman

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Eureka Holdings to begin repairing I.Q. Hurdle House

THURSDAY, MAY 23, 2019 BY JESSI DEVENYNS

After a surprising turn of events last month brought the I.Q. Hurdle House from a demolition-by-neglect case to a Certificate of Appropriateness approval for maintenance and repairs, the Historic Landmark Commission expressed enthusiasm that the fate of the property was looking brighter.

One month later, however, and that enthusiasm has melted into uncertainty as photos show unsecured windows and no sign of any restoration work.

"I don't understand why it hasn't been done," Commissioner Blake Tollett said at the May 20 meeting of the commission. "I don't hear an explanation why the windows aren't boarded up today."

Dallas-based Eureka Holdings – under the name Poisonous Poinsettia – bought the property in 2016. Pam Madere, who was representing the property owner at the meeting, explained that the holding company was hiring the appropriate parties to begin the stabilization and future preservation of the home. She told commissioners that so far the company had hired Ben Wayne Construction for construction and Rebecca Leonard from Lionheart as the landscape architect.

"We're also in the process of interviewing and locating an architect to help us through the process," she said.

A Certificate of Appropriateness does not require a future preservation plan to be in place. The scope of work for the I.Q. Hurdle house includes securing the house, repairing or replacing any rotted wood, painting the house in an appropriate color and inspecting the roof to repair any damage.

Preservation Austin's Caroline Wright, who came to the commission to speak in favor of approving the Certificate of Appropriateness, noted that while Preservation Austin was in favor of approving its initial stabilization plan, "the information presented for the Certificate of Appropriateness is a few simple bullet points that doesn't seem to be actually prepared by someone who understands historic buildings." She said Preservation Austin's "significant level of concern" is compounded by the fact that "the building has been owned by the same entity for three years and they have done literally nothing to it, which has led to its current deterioration."

Several other community members, including Greg Smith, president and CEO of the Austin Revitalization Authority, and members of the Organization of Central East Austin Neighborhoods, expressed similar concerns about the length of time it has taken for Eureka to address the needs of the deteriorating I.Q. Hurdle House and the lack of a timeline for the current stabilization proposal.

Madere told the *Austin Monitor* that "the community engagement process on this particular house has been going on for an extended period of time" and that the looming demolition-by-neglect case did not kick-start the property owner's preservation activities.

"We want what we do now to fit in with the long-term preservation," she said.

Even though Madere assured the commissioners that "we understand and respect the importance of the I.Q. Hurdle home," commissioners remained hesitant about the lack of timeline in the approach.

Commissioner Kevin Koch said that while he appreciated the need for caution "and not just sending out anyone with a hammer and nails," the maintenance requirements were straightforward enough that they could be completed by next month. He suggested to the commission that if in four weeks' time the repairs have not been completed, the commissioners consider reopening the demolition-by-neglect case. "I think it will be the only tool at our disposal," he said. The commission has no authority to impose timelines on a Certificate of Appropriateness.

The commission voted unanimously to approve the Certificate of Appropriateness. Following that vote, they voted unanimously to place the case on the commission's agenda next month for a progress report. Commissioners Emily Reed, Witt Featherston, Ben Heimsath and Emily Hibbs were absent.

As for securing the house, Madere said, "To me, I don't see any reason why it couldn't be done in a week's time."

Photo courtesy of Google Maps.

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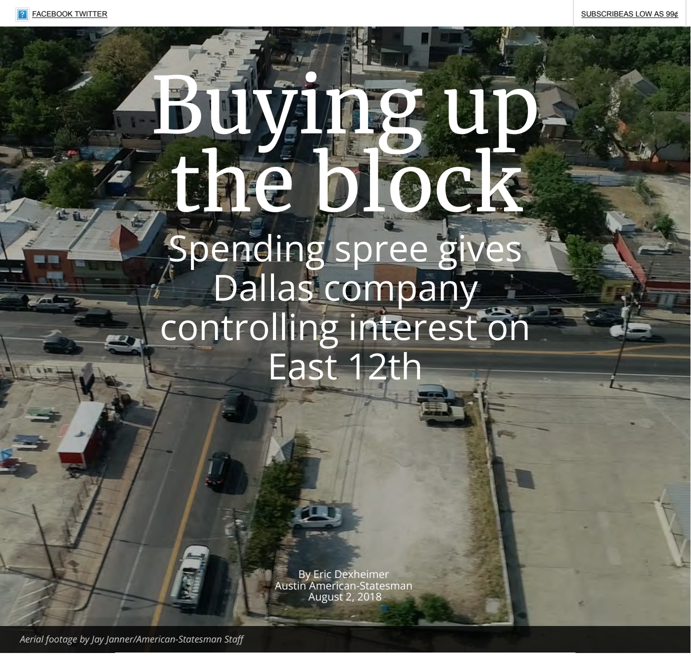


Buying up the block

Spending spree gives Dallas company controlling interest on East 12th

By Eric Dexheimer
Austin American-Statesman
August 2, 2018

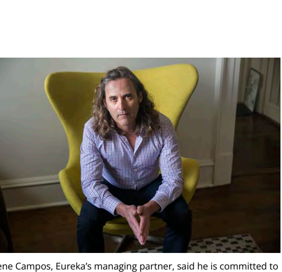
Aerial footage by Jay Janner/American-Statesman Staff

In February 2014, the Austin City Council was finalizing the sale of a publicly owned parcel of land in the heart of East Austin. Efforts to revitalize the culturally important 12th Street corridor have had a long and unsatisfying history. So council members insisted the city get it right with one of the few remaining properties in the area they controlled.

A detailed bidding process had been won by Butler Equities, a local developer that proposed building three dozen housing units, some designated affordable, on the corner of East 12th and Navasota streets. Neighbors had preferred Butler's project, as well — as much for what it wasn't as for what it was. A competing offer from a Dallas-based company called Eureka Holdings would have used the parcel mostly as parking for a boutique hotel it hoped to build nearby — "no significant services … for the neighborhood," the Swede Hill Neighborhood Association summed up.

Speaking from the dais, then-Council Member Bill Spelman stressed that the symbolic value of the project was larger than a single parcel. "You're setting a standard for future developments on 12th Street," he told Butler's representative.

Soon after the deal closed, however, the company quietly sold the property to another developer, who then flipped it to Eureka. The plans that the city had carefully negotiated did not transfer to the new owners. Today, the property remains vacant, owned by the same company neighbors had opposed. Eureka said it has no immediate plans for the parcel.



Rene Campos, Eureka's managing partner, said he is committed to working with locals to make sure development along East 12th Street matches the community's vision. *(RESHMA KIRPALANI / AMERICAN-STATESMAN)*

At street level, Eureka's acquisition of the lot at East 12th and Navasota is just one transaction in an out-of-town company's extraordinary buying spree in East Austin. In recent years Eureka has purchased 114 parcels along and around the corridor, according to county records. They range from small vacant lots and older residences to a historic site and the Mount Carmel Village Apartments, a 50-year-old affordable housing complex.

Eureka's central East Austin portfolio exceeds $50 million, public records show. That doesn't make it Austin's largest or wealthiest real estate company; the developers of downtown's "Jenga" skyscraper are spending an estimated $300 million on a single building.

But by accumulating so many properties in the East 12th Street corridor, once the heart of the city's historic African-American community, the Dallas company has in effect become the largest shareholder of one of Austin's most iconic and culturally sensitive neighborhoods.

Eureka's managing partner, Rene Campos, said he is committed to creating the community locals want and need.

"We're long term, so we don't have the short-term immediate pressures some other organizations might have," he said. "We want to do quality developments that fit in with the neighborhood."

The company has so far revealed little about its intentions, though, telling KUT last year there was "no specific plan at this time" for the 12th Street portfolio. In a city that has seen its African-American share of the population shrink in recent years, Eureka's leverage has created deep anxiety among locals.

"It feels like they have an agenda that is not necessarily the agenda of people who live there," said Council Member Ora Houston, whose district includes the 12th Street corridor. "They can do whatever they want to that community."

Houston said she walked out of an early meeting with company officials when it appeared they had no intention of working with her. It felt the way "indigenous people must have felt when nonindigenous people invaded their land," she said. "It feels like colonization."

Others worry that Eureka's aggressive acquisitions are altering the neighborhood's character, accelerating gentrification in an area ill-equipped to resist it.

"When people are offering as much as they were to us, it changes who stays and who goes," Patrick Houck, a 12th Street resident who said he declined three buyout offers from Eureka, told the City Council recently. "We were able to resist the offers, but some of our neighbors who are struggling are less positioned to remain in their homes."

Underpinning the Dallas company's move into the area are the city's own missteps in East Austin. Eureka's acquisition of a publicly owned parcel slated for other purposes is an apt metaphor for Austin's uneven record over the years on simultaneously developing and preserving a uniquely important neighborhood — efforts local activists say have accomplished neither.

"Eureka has taken advantage of an opportunity created by unfulfilled commitments," said Mike Clark-Madison, who served nine years on the city's Urban Renewal Board before stepping down this year. "They seized the opportunity here and went on a land grab, which has scared the neighborhood to death."

Distrust and 'urban removal'

Austin's complicity in establishing and maintaining its segregated and neglected east side neighborhoods is well-documented.

After the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in 1917 that cities could not use zoning to separate their populations by race, the City Council devised an alternative strategy to accomplish the same goal. By refusing to provide municipal services to African-Americans outside of so-called established Negro districts, officials deliberately created a divided city. The construction of Interstate 35, in 1962, provided a literal demarcation between black and white Austin that persisted for decades.

Despite that, many of the East Austin minority neighborhoods thrived, and longtime residents describe a vibrant community.

"We had a movie theater, a skating rink, a YMCA where we'd go for summer dances," recalled Joyce Nesby, a 70-year resident of the area who grew up in the Rosewood housing development.

Near the corner of Chicon and 12th streets was a grocery store and a business center, she recalled. By the 1950s, there were more than 50 black-owned businesses along East 11th and 12th streets.

Yet by the 1960s, government neglect left much of the area in disrepair, and Austin's urban renewal projects zeroed in on east side minority neighborhoods.

"As of June 1966, nearly one thousand acres were scheduled for clearance or rehab in East Austin," Andrew Busch, an assistant professor at Coastal Carolina University, wrote in a 2015 study of Austin history and gentrification. "Well over one thousand residents were dislocated."

Many didn't return. "Urban renewal was 'urban removal,'" said Mark Rogers, executive director of the nonprofit Guadalupe Neighborhood Development Corp.

The East 11th and 12th street corridors were considered important arteries to the heart of East Austin, and starting in the 1990s city planners created a half-dozen plans to revitalize them. Hoping to lure investment, they relaxed development rules, raising heights, reducing setbacks and scrapping a requirement that new structures be compatible with older ones.

>>Inheriting Inequality: Read the American-Statesman's 2015 series on how the city's history of segregation, and continuing isolation of minority residents, threatens Austin's economic well being.

Over the past two decades the streets' fortunes have diverged.

"The 11th Street corridor has become an attractive entertainment and restaurant destination, while the East 12th Street corridor remains largely unimproved, with many vacant properties," a 2012 study commissioned by the city reported.

In some ways that made sense; 11th Street historically had been more of a commercial center, and the city already owned properties there that it could contribute to revitalization. Austin has spent tens of millions of public dollars on buildings and infrastructure improvements to seed the street's rebirth.

The reasons for 12th Street's relative neglect weren't always obvious, however. The 2012 study recommended Austin invest $10 million to upgrade public infrastructure as it had done on 11th Street, but the money never materialized. Federal housing officials threatened to take back property on 12th they'd helped purchase because the city moved so slowly making use of it.

The 12th Street area was one of the last inner-city neighborhoods to be swept up in the city's recent economic boom. But given its proximity to downtown, its arrival was inevitable. Since 2010, the average price of a property there has risen faster than in any other area in the city.

Locals — by now many of them recent, mostly white transplants drawn to the sleepy charm of a historic neighborhood in the shadow of Austin's skyline — have greeted the land rush with alarm. With the corridor's combination of suppressed development and builder-friendly zoning, the new neighbors say they are now scrambling to control new growth using outdated tools.

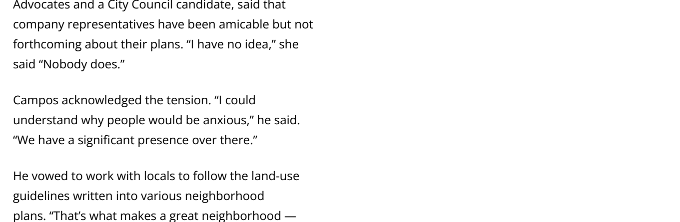
The Kealing Neighborhood Association recently convinced the City Council to lower height limits from 50 feet to 35 feet along parts of 12th Street. "My fear," said Houston, "is that this will become the Domain."

The old, hungry-for-investment land-use rules are "definitely not the Wild West," Clark-Madison said. "But they do allow for an intensity of development that's now outdated in Austin."

Fertile ground, in other words, for an opportunistic real estate investment company to move in.

Explore East Austin parcels owned by Eureka Holdings

The company's 114 properties in the 78702 zip code, held under a variety of names, had a combined appraisal value of more than $51 million in 2017. Click on parcels to see date purchased and appraised value.



Source: Travis County Appraisal District as of June 2018

A half-gentrification?

As one of the fastest-gentrifying sections of one of the fastest-gentrifying cities in the country, East 12th Street could be seen as among Austin's most endangered ecosystems. So Eureka's sudden position at the head of the table has created an urgent guessing game.

Natasha Harper-Madison, founder of East Austin Advocates and a City Council candidate, said that company representatives have been amicable but not forthcoming about their plans. "I have no idea," she said "Nobody does."

Campos acknowledged the tension. "I could understand why people would be anxious," he said. "We have a significant presence over there."

He vowed to work with locals to follow the land-use guidelines written into various neighborhood plans. "That's what makes a great neighborhood — talking to the local residents, talking to the local nonprofits, trying to bring everyone together. A great, vibrant neighborhood is what we'd like to see," he said.

Yet city officials say no blueprints have made it to their desks yet. Meanwhile, neighbors add that some Eureka properties remain vacant or run-down, prompting concerns the company is spurring a sort of half-gentrification — all the exploding prices and dislocation without any of the actual improvement.

For Eureka and Campos, building a neighborhood empire in East Austin represents a departure from previous ventures, which have concentrated on acquiring and managing government-supported affordable housing.

Campos first moved here in 1981 as a student. He moved east after graduation to escape the then-stagnant local economy. Yet it was a financial crisis that was to provide his first big business break.

Fresh out of Harvard Business School, Campos returned to Texas in the early 1990s. He teamed up with two partners to purchase a Dallas apartment complex, with hopes of adding more.

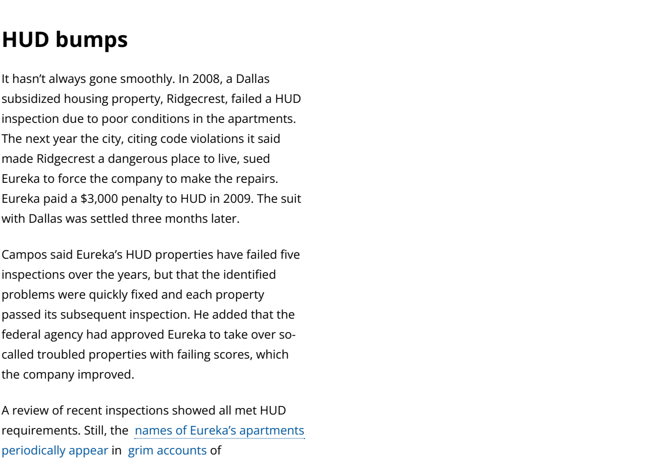
At the time, the Resolution Trust Corp., created to pick up the pieces of the imploded savings and loan industry, had seized more than 100 Texas banks and was looking to unload their portfolios. Campos' first RTC purchase was a distressed apartment complex that rented to low-income residents of Dallas' Bachman Lake neighborhood.

Click play button below to see Eureka purchases on and around 12th Street by year.

The partners moved into the building themselves, repairing it enough to raise both occupancy and rents. They used the income to pick up more RTC properties. Campos said the company eventually grew to 15,000 units. He cashed out in 2001 and traveled some but soon decided to re-enter the low-income housing business by himself.

Today, Campos' Eureka Holdings owns 32 housing complexes in six states, 19 in Texas. Most cater to low-income tenants; a third are in the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's Housing Assistance Program, a voucher system for Section 8 tenants.

"A lot of the things we've done with Eureka is go in and improve neighborhoods, work with local communities to basically better the environment for residents, for community members," Campos said.



Stevin Kane of Kane's Barber Shop cuts Martin Kareithi's hair on a recent Saturday. Kane said a Eureka representative came by his shop numerous times seeking information about the property's owner. *(RICARDO B. BRAZZIELL / AMERICAN-STATESMAN)*

HUD bumps

It hasn't always gone smoothly. In 2008, a Dallas subsidized housing property, Ridgecrest, failed a HUD inspection due to poor conditions in the apartments. The next year the city, citing code violations it said made Ridgecrest a dangerous place to live, sued Eureka to force the company to make the repairs. Eureka paid a $3,000 penalty to HUD in 2009. The suit with Dallas was settled three months later.

Campos said Eureka's HUD properties have failed five inspections over the years, but that the identified problems were quickly fixed and each property passed its subsequent inspection. He added that the federal agency had approved Eureka to take over so-called troubled properties with failing scores, which the company improved.

A review of recent inspections showed all met HUD requirements. Still, the names of Eureka's apartments periodically appear in grim accounts of crimes committed on company property. In 2016, the city of Houston floated (but later abandoned) a "gang injunction" that would have prohibited known gang members from entering a high-crime area centered on Southlawn Palms apartments. The company has been sued several times by former residents for failing to protect victims from murders and assaults.

Eureka donated a security camera system for

Eureka donated a security camera system for Memphis, Tenn., police to monitor its apartments there. In Aliquippa, Pa., a Pittsburgh suburb, it added lighting and security cameras and tightened residency screening after a series of complaints about conditions in its Towne Towers. Acting Police Chief Robert Sealock said the measures have helped.

Eureka entered the Austin market on familiar ground, acquiring the low-income Oak Creek Village Apartments in South Austin and Mount Carmel Village in 2007. Both rent publicly subsidized housing.

Five years ago, the company redeveloped Oak Creek with more than $20 million in public financing, subdividing the land off West Oltorf Street and building another low-income complex called Lucero. Eureka earned high marks for creating affordable housing, particularly in the affluent 78704 area, and including residents in the planning of the complex.

Reviews of the six-story stucco complex since its completion have been mixed. "We didn't anticipate some of the issues we're finding now," said Koreena Malone of the Oak Creek Village Tenants Association, who cited poor maintenance and a rat infestation as concerns.

Travis appraisal records show that between 2008 and 2013, Eureka didn't acquire any additional Austin properties. Over the past four years, though, it has gone on a spree, adding about 30 each year to its portfolio.

Prices 'have been real nice'

"I was in the yard and they came over to speak to me," Otis Bell recalled. "They came with a fair price."

Bell said he was ready to sell by the time Eureka approached him about buying his house near the corner of East 12th and Salina streets. When he acquired it in 1995, the house was valued at less then $17,000. Last year it was appraised at nearly $300,000.

"The taxes made me decide," he said. "They kept going up, up, up, up." He and his wife, Lola, best known as the owner of Nubian Queen Lola's Cajun Soul Food Cafe, have since moved to Taylor.

Just to the west, Pastor Robert Waddle said Simpson United Methodist Church declined Eureka's $300,000 offer for a sliver of land behind the church. "We use it for picnics," he said.

Still, he added, he understands why people have been accepting the company's offers. "How do you defend against growth and change when people are selling willingly? The prices they've been offering have been real nice. And they are very persistent."

Eureka estimated it has purchased 70 percent of its 12th Street corridor properties from listings. But local landowners also trade stories of its relentless solicitations.

"Every other month for the past three years," said Matt Harriss of Butler Equities, which is just starting to build a mixed-use project on East 12th and Angelina streets.

Eureka infuriated some last year when it sent a letter to corridor homeowners warning that Capitol view corridor restrictions limited the value of their land, suggesting it might be prudent to sell to Eureka. Yet the rules, which prohibit buildings that block views of the Capitol in designated sightlines, don't apply to 12th Street.

Campos said the letter referred to a proposal by Houston to extend a Capitol view restriction over parts of the 12th Street area. But the City Council did not approve the idea, which the letter did not mention .

Other missteps have contributed to distrust of the Dallas company. "They are hugely responsible for their bad perception," Clark-Madison said.

Last September, Eureka painted over an iconic mural of a black woman known as the Mama Sana, replacing it with a generic collection of musical instruments and the caption, "Austin, Live Music Capital of the World." Nearly three years after the company purchased a 12th Street house designated historic for its connection to a prominent black family, the property remains boarded up.

"We thought we had made arrangements for the buyer to fix it up and move it," the seller of the I.Q. Hurdle house, Irving Henry Allen Jr., said from his Utah home. Campos said Eureka purchased the property with a partner and although moving the historic structure "remains a potential plan" it "was not a condition of the sale."

At the corner of East 12th and San Bernard streets, Stuart Hines King, owner of King-Tears Mortuary, which has stood at its current location since 1934, said he turned down an early offer to sell to Eureka but wishes the company well.

"I don't have a problem with change and improvement," he said. "But some things in East Austin need to be left alone. This is nothing money can buy."

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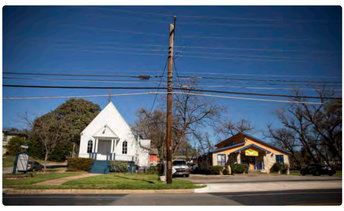
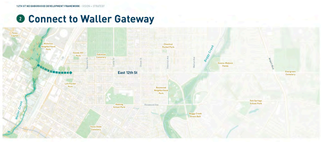


Dallas-based owner of much of East 12th Street teases future plans

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 23, 2019 BY AUDREY MCGLINCHY, KUT

Eureka Holdings, the Dallas-based company that has remained mum about plans for the more than two-dozen properties it has purchased on East 12th Street, has unveiled some initial goals for the area.

The plans offered by Austin-based consulting firm Lionheart, give a conceptual look at what could come to the historically black, bustling commercial street in East Austin, but offered few specifics.



A new boundary for the East Side: East Austin begins at Waller Creek, the freeway crossing should be part of this green, porous, walkable and bike-friendly experience.

Rebecca Leonard, of Lionheart, presented those plans at a Sept. 16 meeting of the city's Urban Renewal Board.

Leonard's plans for specific properties show that Eureka and its partners have been working on a comprehensive plan for the area. For starters, they envision 12th Street as a connection between Waller and Boggy creeks.

Leonard also said Eureka could capitalize on a long-awaited redevelopment of I-35.

Establish East 12th Street as a green corridor linking the two creeks.

"No matter what happens with I-35 – cap it or not cap it or whatever happens – we envision reclaiming East Avenue as the gateway to this corridor," Leonard told board members. "We don't want I-35 to be a barrier to Waller Creek and all it has to offer."

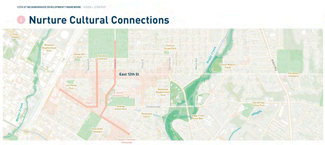
Leonard said that in the future bicyclists and pedestrians should be able to use 12th Street to get from one park space to the other.

In 2017, KUT broke news of Eureka's buy-up, reporting that the holdings company had bought 36 properties in three years on 12th Street between I-35 and Walnut Avenue. Since then, Eureka has continued buying land, accruing more than a dozen additional properties. The company told city board members in September they intend to help maintain some of the neighborhood's cultural spaces – and have done so with one already.

The *Austin Monitor* reported in May that Eureka began restoring one of its properties, the I.Q. Hurdle House, which was home to a black minister and public school teacher. But members of the city's Historic Landmark Commission expressed anger at the company for taking so long to complete repairs.

"Eureka is committed to cleaning up our own properties and also working with the community to push crime and blight out of the area," Leonard said.

Eureka told the Urban Renewal Board in September that it would hire a firm to study what needs to be done to maintain other historic parts of the East Austin neighborhood to "ensure their longterm viability."



Build on the existing cultural heritage and define a cultural area that embraces the cemetery, the G.W. Carver museum, the library, the Huston-Tillotson University and the area's vernacular residential buildings.

Eureka and its partners have not yet disclosed specific plans for the residential properties it owns in East Austin. But at the September meeting Leonard suggested that the company may be interested in building affordable housing.

"I've been part of affordable housing studies and what's always missing it seems is that private sector partner who can actually build the housing and get it completed," she said. Eureka currently owns Mount Carmel Village in East Austin, which accepts low-income housing vouchers. "We're hoping that we can be that partner for the community."

Leonard told board members the company has had discussions with people at Huston-Tillotson University about needs for student housing in the area.

KUT reached out to Eureka to ask what it plans to build, but the company did not provide specifics, though it did say it looks forward to working with the neighborhood in the future.

"Community input is extremely important to us, and we are excited to work together to create affordable and sustainable projects that reflect our community's unique character and values."

Photo credit: Gabriel C. Pérez/KUT. Map credits: GehL Lionheart and James Lima..

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East Austin: East Austin is the quadrant of Austin that, generally speaking, is east of IH-35.

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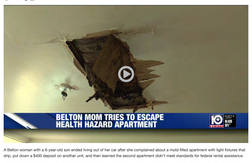
Mold complaints leave local woman, son, living out of car

(Photo by Chelsea Edwards, KWTX)

By Chelsea Edwards

Published: May 22, 2019 at 6:54 PM CDT



A Belton woman with a 6-year-old son ended living out of her car after she complained about a mold-filled apartment with light fixtures that drip, put down a $400 deposit on another unit, and then learned the second apartment didn't meet standards for federal rental assistance.

Tracee Gooden says she moved into a unit last year at the Belle Oaks apartment complex at 1100 Shady Lane in Belton, and there have been issues ever since.

"The problems aren't being fixed; they're being covered up," she said as she pointed out areas where water has leaked through the ceiling.

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Mold grows along the walls, making her son's breathing problems worse.

Gooden pressed an area around an electrical outlet to show how pliable the wallboard is, and her fingers pushed through the drywall.

The moisture has even caused an electrical fire when she plugged in phone charger.

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"I couldn't even move my hand from the plug," she said.

"It shocked me and caught fire."

The source of the water appears to be the unit above her apartment, which has a gaping hole in the roof.

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The insulation is hanging out and has turned black, and pools of water sit on the floor.

Gooden recently noticed sparks from the ceiling and called the Belton Fire Department, which tried to help.

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She says a representative of the Red Cross came by, checked out the apartment, deemed it unlivable and gave her money to find a new place.

Three days later, she said, Belle Oaks offered her a new unit, but required a $400 deposit, which she paid.

"The extra money that I gave them was from Red Cross to make sure I had somewhere to go," says Gooden.

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"And I still don't."

That's because after she moved her things in, the locks were changed.

Gooden receives Section 8 federal rental assistance, and the local Housing and Urban Development Office confirmed her new apartment didn't pass inspection.

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"It's a waiting game. They're not going to approve it. I can't move in. Can I have my money back?" she said.

She and her son have been sleeping in her car ever since.

KWTX contacted the president of the apartment management company, Eureka Multifamily Group, and he said Gooden would be allowed into the new unit, even if the rent hasn't been paid and said the unit will be repaired so it meets federal standards.

Religious organization helps to give sleeping bags to homeless

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LOCAL NEWS

Apartment complex among many listed in million dollar lawsuit filed on behalf of injured police officer

Wednesday, the attorney representing the former owner and management said there was no basis for action and asked that his clients be dropped from the lawsuit.

Author: Kill Staff
Published: 10:47 PM CST January 5, 2022
Updated: 11:23 PM CST January 5, 2022

CORPUS CHRISTI, Texas — The Corpus Christi police officer who was shot in the line of duty while responding to a domestic disturbance at the former Watercolor Apartments back in August has filed a lawsuit seeking over one million dollars in relief.

Senior Officer Manuel Dominguez, a 20-year veteran of the force was responding to a domestic disturbance at the apartments on Weber Road when he was shot multiple times.

FEATURED BY

Police say the suspect, 20-year-old Joshua Powell opened fire on him and fled the scene. Following a massive statewide manhunt, Powell was eventually caught the next day in the same area of the crime.

He's now charged with attempted Capital murder.

Among those listed in the suit, the alleged shooter, but also the prior owners of the apartment complex itself where the incident took place.

The officer's attorney Rob George with Liles White Firm claimed that the shooting should have been foreseeable and that the prior owners of the complex allowed criminal activity to occur without action for years.

Wednesday, the attorney representing the former owner and management said there was no basis for action and asked that his clients be dropped from the lawsuit.

The hearing to dismiss was done via Zoom and video recordings were not allowed.

According to court documents, the lawsuit alleged the shooting was not the first criminal activity at the complex and included a prior domestic violence incident involving Powell 3 months before the incident.

The lawsuit which was filed back in October goes on to claim the prior and current owners, operators, or managers of the apartments, "knew or should have known, of the violent and reckless nature of many of the tenants and guests in the Apartments. Nevertheless, Defendants consciously ignored these tenants' and guests' criminal propensities, including but not limited to, Defendant Joshua Powell's. Instead of evicting these dangerous individuals, Defendants continued to profit from them."

At Wednesday's hearing, the attorney representing the former owner 2014 Corpus Weber Road LLC and Eureka Multifamily Group which managed and leased the apartments, asked for the removal of his clients from the list of Defendants.

The defendant's attorney Doni Mazaheri pleaded his reasoning to County Court at Law Judge Robert Vargas to dismiss his clients from the case saying his clients did not own, operate or manage the property on the day of the shooting and added they sold the property two months prior to the shooting.

Mazaheri also attempted to use the 'common law firefighters' rule'.

The rule basically states that a first responder like a firefighter or police officer cannot recover a premises liability case for injuries that resulted from risks that come from responding to an emergency.

He also asked for the recovery of attorney's fees.

The attorney representing Dominguez objected to the argument regarding the firefighters' rule saying it was filed just two hours before the hearing.

The judge will consider Wednesday's arguments and make a ruling at a later time.

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OPINION

Editorial: HUD props up an apartment complex failing its tenants

By dallasnews Administrator
2:38 AM on Mar 17, 2010

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Harvard-educated Rene Campos Jr. made a fortune by buying, rehabilitating and reselling distressed private apartment properties. Today, at 46, he lives in a million-dollar University Park home, owns a $4 million vacation property in Hawaii, plays polo, rides a custom motorcycle and drives a Land Rover.

Nothing wrong with being wealthy.

The problem is whether Campos and his investment company, Eureka Holdings, are living up to his self-described "mantra": "We provide clean, safe, affordable housing for people."

Eureka's tenants at the Ridgecrest Terrace apartments in west Oak Cliff might beg to differ. Despite a constant stream of federal rent subsidies to the complex - including $1.5 million from the latest stimulus package - they describe a hellish swirl of drug activity, mold and mildew simply painted over, carpet so filthy it causes blackened feet and rashes, water-leak stains on walls.

Our issue isn't just with Campos, a guy apparently more concerned with maximizing income by holding down expenses than with fulfilling housing commitments. It's also with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, which lets him get away with it.

Campos' stimulus windfall was part of a $2 billion HUD effort to ensure that HUD-contracted landlords received a full year of rent subsidy payments. Ridgecrest Terrace was one of 14 Dallas County properties - nine in southern Dallas - to benefit. This, despite a record of failed HUD property inspections (later overturned on appeal), a city lawsuit to force repairs of substandard conditions (later settled) and the property's failure to file audited financial statements on time (leading to a $3,000 fine).

If Campos is a slumlord, he's giving other slumlords a bad name. HUD's inability to separate worthy property owners from the chaff confirms criticisms of the $787 billion stimulus as larded with fraud and waste.

HUD's response to this newspaper's Steve McGonigle, whose research and reporting produced the Ridgecrest Terrace revelations, was dispiriting. A spokesman in Washington tried to explain the "delicate balance" between holding landlords accountable and making sure even the poor had decent housing. HUD supervisors locally and in Washington chose to not respond.

Campos tried to explain his side by blaming city vendettas for many of his problems at Ridgecrest Terrace.

Caught in the middle, of course, are the tenants, who just want that "clean, safe, affordable housing." Landlords have the ultimate hammer, which is walking away if HUD leans on them too hard. With so much of southern Dallas' housing stock tied up in complexes like Ridgecrest Terrace, tossing families into the street is a black eye HUD and the city don't need.

Neither is looking away while people with few other options live in squalor.READ previous commentary on Dallas' north-south gap.

dallasnews.com /opinion/northsouth

JOIN the conversation at our north-south gap blog. gapblog.dallasnews.com

dallasnews Administrator
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News Release City of Houston Housing and Community Development Department (HCDD) is announcing changes to Round 2 of its Harvey Multifamily Program

OCTOBER 14, 2020

HOUSTON – The City of Houston Housing and Community Development Department (HCDD) is announcing changes to Round 2 of its Harvey Multifamily Program, due to recent changes to housing tax credits allocated by the Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs (TDHCA). Two new developments have been approved, one development has been removed, and two developments have changed funding amounts.

The modifications bring the total amount of funding for this round to $170,250,000, which will be distributed between 16 developments. The changes bring new affordable apartments to priority areas, including Gulfton Complete Community and Piney Point Village, and ensure that chosen developments have the capacity to create high-quality communities for residents.

The currently proposed Round 2 of the program will create 1,932 apartments. Combined with Round 1, the Harvey Multifamily Program is expected to bring 3,400 new, resilient apartments to Houston, 3,000 of which will be held at affordable prices to provide greater choice and quality of homes to low- and moderate-income Houstonians.

Detailed changes are as follows:

- Proposal "The Ella" is no longer being recommended.
- Connect South Apartments, developed by Brinshore Connect Communities, will be awarded $7,300,000 to create 77 new units located within the Gulfton Complete Community in District J.
- Ella Grand, developed by DMA Development, will be awarded $6,500,000 to develop 145 new units in District G, in an area experiencing high rental costs.

A complete list of the 16 developments that the City of Houston recommends can be viewed in full in the table below.

Development	Developer	Other Financing	Total Units	Council Dist.	HCDD Priority	Recommended Awardi
3300 Caroline Street	NHP Foundation / Magnificat Houses, Inc.	9% HTCs	149	D	Permanent Supportive Housing	$15,000,000
Canal Lofts	Blazer Building	9% HTCs	150	H	Located within 2nd Ward Complete Community	$12,000,000
Regency Lofts	DWR Development Group / WALIPP	9% HTCs	120	D	Located within the Community Reinvestment Area (TIRZ 7)	$12,500,000
Dian Street Villas	SuperUrban Realty / Texas Inter-Faith Development	9% HTCs	108	C	Areas experiencing high rental costs	$11,000,000
New Hope Housing Savoy	New Hope Housing	9% HTCs	120	J	Located within the Community Reinvestment Area (TIRZ 20)	$12,000,000
Connect South Apartments	Brinshore / Connect Communities	9% HTCs	77	J	Located with Gulfton Complete Community	$7,300,000
Southlawn at Milby	Eureka Holdings	9% HTCs	110	I	Preservation of Affordable Housing	$7,500,000
Campanile on Briar Hollow	Kilday Operating	9% HTCs	85	G	Areas experiencing high rental costs	$6,700,000
Heritage Senior Residences	Atlantic Pacific Companies	9% HTCs	135	C	Areas experiencing high rental costs	$11,700,000
Ella Grand	DMA Development	9% HTCs	145	G	Areas experiencing high rental costs	$6,500,000
Houston Area Women's Center	HAWC	Other	135	D	Supportive Housing	$14,850,000
Lockwood South Apartments	Brinshore / Buffalo Bayou Partnership	9% HTCs	80	H	Located within 2nd Ward Complete Community	$7,500,000
Caroline Lofts	Mark-Dana Corp	4% HTCs	119	D	Located within the Community Reinvestment Area (TIRZ 2)	$17,800,000
Temenos Place Apartments	NHP Foundation / Temenos CDC	4% HTCs	94	D	Preservation of Affordable Housing	$8,000,000
The HAY Center Campus	Harris County Housing Authority	Other	50	I	Permanent Supportive Housing	$5,000,000
Summit at Renaissance Park	Zieben Group	4% HTCs	325	B	Located within Community Reinvestment Area (TIRZ 11)	$14,900,000
Total Round 2			**1,932**			**$172,250,000**

i) amount provided is based on the application and is subject to revision during HCDD underwriting.

For more information regarding the Harvey Multifamily Program, please refer to the program's website, which includes an interactive map of projects that have received funding, at https://recovery.houstontx.gov/multifamily-program/.

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