

Memorandum

TO: HONORABLE MAYOR
AND CITY COUNCIL

FROM: Jacky Morales-Ferrand

SUBJECT: VINTAGE TOWERS –
UPDATE ON FIRE DISPLACEMENT

DATE: August 10, 2016

Approved



Date

8/11/16

INFORMATION

The Housing Department is providing this memorandum to update the Mayor and City Council on the impact of the fire at Vintage Towers, the City's efforts to provide support, and the current housing status of the displaced residents.

On July 17, a small fire at Vintage Towers (235 East Santa Clara Street) resulted in the displacement of residents from all 59 affordable apartments at the location, including apartments for veterans and other extremely low-income tenants, due to extensive water damage from the sprinkler system and a complete loss of power in the building. To respond to the needs of the displaced residents, the Red Cross immediately opened a fire shelter at Burnett Middle School to provide temporary care. In coordination with the Housing Department and the Office of Emergency Services (OES), the Red Cross continued to operate the site until July 26, providing shelter to approximately 25-30 impacted residents each night. Residents not using the shelter found temporary housing at a variety of other locations including staying with family and friends or at hotels and motels. During this initial period, OES and Housing Department staff also convened a working group of internal and external stakeholders to address urgent issues such as partnering with the Department of Public Works to set up portable cooling units at the shelter site in response to an extreme heat wave that coincided with the event.

On July 26, the Red Cross transitioned the operation of the fire shelter to a City contractor, HomeFirst. Given the limited income and vulnerability of many of the residents, HomeFirst – an experienced provider of mass shelter in Santa Clara County – was well equipped to assess the various needs of the individuals staying at the fire shelter. HomeFirst identified several ongoing concerns of the residents staying at the shelter, including food access, case management, and transportation. HomeFirst coordinated with several nonprofits and the County Office of Supportive Housing to address other issues as necessary. Services were provided at the shelter until all residents had secured alternative housing options. The organization ceased operations at the site on July 30.

The primary goal of the City's intervention was to ensure that a secure housing plan existed for all of the displaced residents. Under municipal code section 17.20.2000, property owners are required to provide certain relocation benefits for the displaced tenants. During the period of shelter, the property owner, Standard Property Company (Standard), was concurrently working on both a rehabilitation timeline for the apartments and a relocation package for the displaced residents. Due to the extensive water damage to the apartments, compounded by additional site access and construction challenges, Standard estimated approximately six to eight weeks (mid to late September) before the majority of residents could reoccupy their apartments.

To comply with the ordinance and address the immediate needs of those residents in the fire shelter, Standard provided 21 households with rooms at three hotels beginning on the evening of July 28. Standard also provided every household with a refund of their rents from the onset of the fire displacement, as well as food and transportation stipends.

Following this temporary placement, Standard has retained the firm Overland, Pacific & Cutler (OPC) to interpret the City ordinance and manage the extended relocation planning and implementation. OPC will also serve as the lead for resident contact going forward to relieve communication issues that created challenges during the early stages of the incident. OPC began contacting all impacted residents on August 2, including those who had not accessed the fire shelter, to determine their individual needs. The current plan is to place residents at extended stay hotels in the area for the duration of their displacement, providing them with food and transportation stipends as well as access to a similar living environment that includes a full kitchen and other necessary amenities. While Standard estimates monthly expenses for this temporary housing to be approximately \$3,500 per apartment, tenants will only be required to pay a sum equal to their current rent at Vintage Towers during their stay. Alternatively, residents will have the option of receiving an equivalent monetary payment with a transportation stipend in lieu of staying at a hotel. The Housing Department will continue to actively communicate with Standard on the timeline for reconstruction and to make certain all of the needs of the residents continue to be met.

/s/
JACKY MORALES-FERRAND
Director, Housing Department

For questions, please contact Ray Bramson, Division Manager, at (408) 535-8234.

