



MEMORANDUM
Neighborhood Services

TO: The Honorable Jeff Danner, Chair and Members of City Council

FROM: Dave Metz, Deputy Mayor, Neighborhood Services

DATE: April 15, 2009

SUBJECT: Multi-Family Intervention Program

During these recent economic times, the city has developed many initiatives to assist residents hold onto their homes or secure housing – whether through lien amnesty, the neighborhood stabilization program, access to foreclosure assistance, and most recently, the new Multi-Family Intervention Program. This new program is geared to helping families residing in rental properties that have become threatened due to the landlord’s financial insolvency, foreclosure, or mounting city codes violations. The goal of the program is to prevent the displacement of families, or to arrange housing to prevent those individuals from being placed on the street.

City staff has been actively involved with four (4) properties with delinquent or disconnected water utility service, active code/fire violations and no on-site property management. Each property was assessed by several City departments including Fire, Police, Codes Compliance Assistance, Utility Accounts and Development Services. The City’s Legal Department and Social Services Division also participated in the assessment.

The initial step in the assessment process was to determine current ownership of the multi-family properties and make contact with a representative. In the case of two (2) properties, the water service accounts were delinquent and arrangements were made to bring the accounts current. In one instance this was arranged directly with the bank, and with the other property the residents stepped forward to pay the deposit and establish a new account. The most significant issue with all of the properties was the potential displacement of residents. Each of the properties had to be assessed to confirm the number of residents, and if necessary, arrange housing to prevent those individuals from being placed on the street.

At the direction of Mayor Baker, the Multi-Family Intervention Program was implemented to address these properties as part of an overall strategy to assist the community in these difficult economic conditions. Mayor Baker has assigned responsibility for this program to the Deputy Mayor for Neighborhood Services.

This report identifies the properties, outlines the steps taken by staff and the new procedures placed into effect.

Motel Complex – 4601 34th Street South

This property is the former Holiday Inn South that contains 130 units with a lounge. This property initially started with complaints from the Broadwater Neighborhood residents in early September 2008. The Codes Compliance Assistance Department was assigned to inspect the

property and to identify any potential issues. On September 15th, representatives from several City departments including Codes, Fire and Development Services met on-site. The Fire Department inspection determined there were twenty-two (22) violations including guardrails, smoke and fire alarms, emergency lights and fire extinguishers. The site inspection also included a representative from the State of Florida Department of Hotel & Restaurants. The Codes Department determined that the property was in foreclosure and that both water and electric accounts were in arrears.

Both the Codes and Fire Department continued to monitor the property during the month of October 2008 to insure compliance. Most of the serious violations were determined to be complied with, but City staff planned to perform periodic site inspections until all of the violations were corrected.

On November 26, 2008, the City received information that the electric service was scheduled to be turned off on November 28th. The property owner also notified the City that the thirty-six (36) individuals were going to be evicted on December 1st. Due to no active electricity and fire alarms, the City posted the property as “unfit for habitation” on the same date. The motel lounge was closed since the license was only in effect if the motel was open. The property owner also met on-site with Fire Department personnel to determine the necessary steps to temporarily secure the site.

On December 1, 2008, the City coordinated efforts to locate temporary housing for thirty-six (36) individuals, including twenty-six (26) children, age infant to 18 years old. The City, Pinellas County Human Services Department, Catholic Charities, Free Clinic, Daystar, Pinellas Opportunity Council and a local church, wanting to remain anonymous, provided financial support or other assistance. Several families were placed in a local motel until housing could be arranged. Local businesses offered assistance, including Winn Dixie, which provided holiday gifts, meals and groceries to the families.

Apartment Complex – 3461 Burlington Avenue North

This property is a twenty (20) unit residential apartment complex located in the Central Plaza area. The Utility Accounts Department notified this office in early December 2008 that the water utility account was in arrears. The Codes Department was assigned to inspect the property and to identify any potential issues. Ten (10) units were determined to be occupied at this time. The former on-site management company representative also informed the Codes Department that the owner had abandoned the property and foreclosure action was imminent. The electric service was turned off in half of the complex’s common areas including the water heaters due to delinquent accounts.

I met with representatives from several City departments on December 15th, including Legal, Fire, Codes, Police and Utility Accounts to discuss a course of action. It was decided that Utility Accounts would proceed with filing a lien for the water utility fees with a copy to all other parties with financial interests in the property. The Codes Department also contacted the mortgage company in New York and spoke to a representative. The representative traveled to St. Petersburg and performed a site inspection in early January 2009.

In late January 2009, the mortgage company representative finalized arrangements for a property management company. The utility accounts with the City and Progress Energy were also resolved.

The Mayor directed administrative staff at this time that the Deputy Mayor for Neighborhood Services has final approval for water utility shut-offs at multi-family properties.

Apartment Complex – 1700 Block of Russell Street South

This property is a six (6) building apartment complex located in the 1700 block of Russell Street South (1729, 1743, 1757, 1771, 1785 and 1799). The Utility Accounts Department notified this office in March 2009 that these buildings were substantially delinquent with their water utility accounts. Each building has four (4) residential units for a total of twenty four (24).

The Codes Department researched the ownership of the property and it was determined that multiple owners were involved. The properties were also determined to be in foreclosure.

I met with representatives from several City departments, including Legal, Fire, Codes, Police and Utility Accounts on March 30th. The Utility Accounts Department notified the tenants that the water service would be shut-off for non-payment, but that each respective building pay a deposit to prevent this. Four (4) of the six (6) buildings did finalize the deposit to avoid the water service shut-off. The City continues to monitor the property.

Apartment Complex – 1510 9th Avenue North

This property is a five (5) unit apartment complex at 1510 9th Avenue North that had on-going police related issues. On March 29th, I met with the President of the Historic Uptown Neighborhood Association and representatives from Codes, Police and Social Services to discuss this property.

Prior to this meeting, the Codes Department made contact with a representative of the mortgage company in Tampa who agreed to cooperate with the City in addressing the issues. The water service had been shut-off on all of the units. The electric service remained active on the two (2) occupied units. Both were metered individually, although one had been tampered with.

Codes and the Police Department monitored the property and communicated with the property owner. The property owner had agreed to assist in evicting the occupied units and securing the property until it can be sold.

On April 2, 2009, the property was secured by the Codes Department.

Staff will continue to monitor multi-family properties throughout the City and utilize these recent experiences in resolving future issues.

DMM/vjs

cc: Mayor Baker
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John Wolfe, City Attorney
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Mike Connors, Administrator, Internal Services
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