

WORK SESSION OF THE GREENBELT CITY COUNCIL held Wednesday, March 17, 2010, for the purpose of meeting with the management of Empirian Village.

Mayor Davis called the meeting to order at 8:05 p.m. in the MultiPurpose Room of the Community Center.

PRESENT WERE: Councilmembers Konrad E. Herling, Emmett V. Jordan, Leta M. Mach, Silke I. Pope, Edward V.J. Putens, Rodney M. Roberts and Mayor Judith F. Davis.

STAFF PRESENT WERE: Michael McLaughlin, City Manager; Celia Craze, Director of Planning and Community Development; Jim Sterling, Assistant Director of Community Development; Capt. Tom Kemp and Lt. Carl Schinner, Greenbelt Police; and Cindy Murray, City Clerk.

ALSO PRESENT WERE: Sharon Thames, Fred Brinn and Michael Arrington, Empirian Village; Rev. Dan Hamlin, Kevin Hammett and Jamie Krauk, Community Relations Advisory Board; Cindy Comproni, Laura Kressler and Luis Vazquez, Public Safety Advisory Committee; Brian Gibbons, Advisory Planning Board; Mary Clark, Greenbelt News Review; Lore Rosenthal, David Abraham, Willie Stewart, Kerima Cevik, Mary Babbitt, Bill Orleans and others.

Introductions

Mayor Davis welcomed everyone to the meeting. She noted the meeting was a stakeholder meeting with the representatives of Empirian Village.

Overview of Recent Events/Issues

Mr. Sterling reported on the working relationship between the City and Empirian Village management over the past year. He noted the City's concerns regarding their response to code violation issues, emergency situations, and maintenance complaints. He reported that management is now meeting regularly with the City and there have been noticeable improvements regarding property management.

Review of Issues and Points of Agreement

Ms. Craze discussed the following issues and points that Empirian Village management had agreed to in recent meetings with the City.

- a. Respond to tenant/resident maintenance complaints within 72 hours.*
- b. Repair maintenance complaints within 14 days, under normal circumstances.*
- c. Establish system for the routine inspection of all buildings on a weekly basis to identify repairs/maintenance issues, etc.*
- d. Advise the City of any planned capital improvement project prior to work being started.*
- e. Maintain a 24/7 call-in phone line to accept reports of maintenance problems and alert maintenance staff of issues requiring immediate attention. (Staff will be available to respond to emergencies situations at all times).*
- f. Provide names and phone numbers of critical personnel to the City for emergency situations.*
- g. Assist residents displaced as a result of property maintenance issues.*
- h. Provide for an emergency representative to be available at all times to authorize and facilitate relocation for displaced tenants.*
- i. Meet with the City on a monthly basis to discuss issues related to property maintenance and other associated issues.*
- j. Pay fees and fines owed to the City within 30 days of notification of such fees and fines.*

Power Outages

Ms. Thames said that management had gone above and beyond what was required in the residents lease agreements in this emergency. She reported management provided credit for displaced residents and worked together with the City and County to get school bus transportation issues resolved.

Ms. Mach suggested the Greenbelt Marriott be considered if residents need to be temporarily relocated in the future. She said this location would be more convenient to schools and transportation services. Mr. Brinn said they would look into contracting with Marriott.

Mr. Jordan and Ms. Pope mentioned the lack of communications between management and displaced residents during the emergency. Ms. Thames disagreed, stating that regular updates were provided every 48 hours.

Newsletter

Ms. Thames said the newsletter had been published all year, but they were now in the process of contracting with a new company to produce the newsletters for this year. Mayor Davis reported that Council had only received one or two copies of the newsletter over the past year.

Mr. Putens noted he had requested Empirian Village include City informational items in the newsletter but this had never been done.

Mr. Putens questioned a letter that had gone out to residents from Empirian Village management informing residents that they may be responsible for repair costs if they contact the City to report problems. Mr. Brinn said the letter was to remind residents that if inspectors cited Empirian Village for damage caused by the residents, such as unclean units or holes in doors or walls, they would be responsible for costs associated with the repair and violation notice.

Empirian Village Staffing

Mr. Roberts and Ms. Pope asked how many employees were on staff with Empirian Village. Mr. Brinn said they have an adequate number of in-house and contract employees, but would not reveal the exact number. He commented that staffing was a private business decision.

Mayor Davis asked how often cleaning crews clean the common areas of the buildings. Ms. Thames said these areas were cleaned three times a week by contract employees.

Trash/Recycling

Mr. Putens reported a large amount of trash spills onto the ground when the trash containers are emptied by the contractor. He suggested Empirian Village speak to the contractor about the problem and consider installing fencing around the trash containers.

Ms. Thames said there are large white recycling containers in six or seven locations throughout the community. She commented that residents need to be educated in recycling. Mayor Davis suggested they contact Luisa Robles, the City's Recycling Coordinator, to help promote recycling. Mr. Arrington said he would contact Ms. Robles tomorrow.

Crime/Security/Lighting

Lt. Schinner reported that crime incidents in the Empirian Village area had been reduced as a result of increased patrol units and saturation team overtime details. He added that staff is concerned that

resources are being stretched to accommodate the issues in Empirian Village and other areas of the City are not receiving the same levels of police coverage.

Lt. Schinner reported that saturation teams check on vacant apartments on a weekly basis and frequently find drug paraphernalia and/or stolen property in the units. Ms. Thames said their staff checks vacant apartments daily and makes repairs of broken windows, locks, etc. immediately.

Lt. Schinner complimented Officer White, who is assigned to Empirian Village through the partnership agreement. He also thanked Empirian Village for recent lighting improvements which have been very helpful to the police.

Mr. Putens said some residents fear retaliation and often don't report criminal activity. Ms. Thames said she wasn't aware of this problem but would discuss it with Officer White.

Tenant Issues

Kerima Cevik, 9120 Springhill Lane, said she had been a resident of Empirian Village for seven years and had never had the need to call the City Code Enforcement office for assistance until last year. She reported that a HVAC leak was improperly handled by maintenance staff and caused a water valve burst that flooded her entire unit. Ms. Cevik also reported a continuing problem with rodent infestation in her unit, and broken glass and debris on the walkways of the complex. She commented that the community has great potential but lacks the support of management.

Mr. Stewart, 9014 Breezewood Terrace, said he has called the City at least 20 times when Empirian Village management hasn't responded to his maintenance requests regarding leaking pipes and mice and roach infestations. He stated that residents are treated disrespectfully by Empirian Village staff members.

Mr. Gibbons, 9133 Edmonston Terrace, said he had been a resident for nine years and had been generally satisfied. He said the current problems in Empirian Village appear to be from a breakdown in communication and a lack of leadership within the organization. Mr. Gibbons suggested Empirian Village establish an advisory board to aid in communications between residents and management.

Mr. Abraham, 5995 Springhill Drive, said he had been a resident for only six months and had only seen a cleaning person clean his building hallway once during that time. He also reported on problems with an incorrect lease rate on his apartment, maintenance issues that were not properly addressed, and the illegal towing of his vehicle in December.

Mary Babbitt, 9166 Edmonston Road, said she had lived in the complex for many years and was very happy with the previous management, but feels residents are treated disrespectfully by Empirian Village staff. She commented that she had stayed in her building for four days without power and had only been compensated \$70 by Empirian Village.

Mr. Arrington commented this was the first time Empirian Village staff had heard of these complaints.

Future Plans

Mr. Brinn said all major capital projects have been put on hold at this time due to financial reasons. He said they are concentrating their efforts on maintaining operations.

Follow-Up

Mayor Davis and Council said they hope to see improvements with the new system in place by Empirian Village and requested another work session be scheduled for June.

Mr. Putens said Council recently sent a referral to the Public Safety Advisory Committee and the Community Relations Advisory Board requesting the committees review neighborhood issues in Empirian Village, solicit input from the residents, determine what types of actions or services are needed, and report back to Council. Mr. Brinn said Empirian Village would be willing to work with the committees on this issue.

Other Issues

Mr. Herling stressed that the News Review is a valuable resource to all residents and suggested Empirian Village work to ensure residents in their development receive the weekly issue.

Ms. Mach questioned how Empirian Village was addressing current economic problems faced by their residents. Ms. Thames said they are seeing increasing numbers of people unable to pay their rent, not only in Greenbelt but throughout the country. She said Empirian Village offers assistance to residents and is willing to work with them.

Mr. Jordan thanked Empirian Village staff for their efforts in the Complete Census Count and for their assistance to Camp Fire USA.

The meeting was adjourned at 10:43 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

*Cindy Murray
City Clerk*