

SPECIAL CITY COUNCIL MEETING

March 20, 2023

The City Council of the City of Albemarle met in a special session on Monday, March 20, 2023 at 5:15 p.m. in the Council Chambers of City Hall to discuss a Public Housing Capital Project. Mayor Ronnie Michael presided, and the following members were present, to-wit: Mayor Pro Tempore Martha Sue Hall and Councilmembers Chris Bramlett, Chris Whitley, Dexter Townsend, Bill Aldridge, David Hunt, and Benton Dry.

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Mayor Michael called the meeting to order.

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Public Housing Capital Project Discussion and Update

Wayne Stogner of Stogner Architects came forward to provide Council an update and discuss the status of the sewer rehabilitation project. He distributed materials to Council related to the scope of work and renderings.

The scope of the sewer rehabilitation project will encompass repairs to the sewer infrastructure plus 1 recycle unit project. Pipes installed throughout both complexes are cast iron which have a 50-70 year lifecycle, so all piping is beyond its timeframe for replacement.

There are two critical concerns: collapsed pipe lines, and raw sewage dumps (currently contractors have found 1 outside a unit, and 1 inside a unit). Mr. Stogner proceeded to show pictures of various conditions of apartment units thus far, with explanations about what Council was viewing and what the plan was for rehabilitation.

The first slide showed cabinets in a kitchen. Kitchen cabinets would need to be removed in order to get access to the piping underneath the sink. The plan would be to refinish cabinets or another option would be to install new countertops and sinks after the pipe repair/replacement work was completed. The Mayor asked why cabinets would be recycled when Council agreed that all work should be redone now in a unit rather than piecemeal work. Dr. Scott has concerns about funding levels for the capital project with replacing everything.

Mayor Pro Tem Hall asked about when Stogner started noticing sewer issues. In 2019-2020 it was noticed in 1 unit, and in late 2021/early 2022 with a pipe back up issue in other units contractors started looking further into the issue. Why was the sewer issue prevalent at that time? Per Stogner the sewer back up issue found early last year was due largely to tenants not taking care of their apartments.

Councilmember Aldridge entered the meeting.

Mr. Stogner showed another picture of an HVAC filter in an apartment and noted filters need to be replaced, and should be part of a maintenance routine. Whose responsibility would it be to check filters? Public Housing maintenance staff should be doing this. Also bathroom fans need to be cleaned.

How are units inspected? Every 2 weeks 25 units are inspected per street and are done in 2-week intervals. Jennifer Bowman has been handling inspections since her hiring in the second half of last year. How many times per year are units inspected? Around 6 times per unit. Public Housing staff were asked if inspections were previously documented, which they replied they can only confirm that inspections under their time at the City are being documented.

A Councilmember commented that Public Housing maintenance staff's work routine needs to be improved. Dr. Scott agreed and stated to Council he was working on that.

Mr. Stogner continued his report out by announcing that lead and asbestos testing has been completed, with his firm receiving results on lead levels back, which were negative. His firm should receive the asbestos results next week. He recommended that Public Housing keep the test results permanently in their files. A sampling of units was tested and it is up to the contracted testing company to decide when enough testing samples have been collected to produce sufficient results.

Next steps after the testing is complete would be to cut 2 feet trench of floors of units to access the pipes. He asked Council if asbestos testing comes back positive whether contractors should replace the minimum amount of floor tile which is positive or replace all floor tiles? The Mayor responded that Council would want all flooring to be pulled up, removed, and replaced.

Would the rehab work be done in just Amhurst Gardens? No testing and abatement would be done in both Amhurst and Elizabeth.

If the cabinets were taken down and black mold was found how would that be handled? If that were found cabinets would be replaced after remediation was completed.

A picture of a cracked doorframe and split door was shown. Mr. Stogner noted that his assessment was that this damage was likely the result of an attempt to kick or force the door open.

The next picture shown was of exposed piping. This was work done by another contractor last year and discontinued because Dr. Scott noted to Council that he did not think that contractor was competently fixing the piping and halted work. This unit will be fixed by new contractors with this current sewer rehabilitation project.

Mr. Stogner noted that other minor work will be done as part of this project, including painting mailboxes and outside posts, as well as major work such as replacement of sheet rock and flooring, bathroom piping, toilet piping, and brackets for piping installation. The contractors will also re-do fire walls in apartments to be up to current code and removing attic fans. Bathrooms likely will be fully gutted and rebuilt.

Council and staff had a discussion about why some cabinetry in apartments had been redone or replaced when others are slated for that as part of the larger sewer rehabilitation project. Dr. Scott and Mr. Ferris both clarified for Council that there are among this larger project some unit vacancy turnaround projects also being done in order to prepare some of the units for another tenant as they are vacated. Those 2 projects are mutually exclusive.

Mr. Stogner showed a series of pictures of more extensive damage found in units, such as plumbing leaks on the second floor leaking through the ceiling on the first floor and sheet rock holes.

Conversely a picture then was shown of pipe replacement work that was completed to show Council what the results would look like.

Mr. Stogner noted that if the asbestos testing results come back negative, his firm would be able to bid on the main rehabilitation project soon. What would be the timeframe for asbestos abatement if needed? For floor abatement, the rate of work would be 2 apartments per day, but it is unknown for ceiling abatement. For clarification a question was asked about the type of ceilings, to which Mr. Stogner replied that for units with second floors the ceilings are drop in ceilings.

Are all units needing the sewer rehabilitation work done vacant? Mr. Stogner replied that during the testing phase of the project 5 additional units were found which need work.

What would be the timing of cabinet replacement? Four to six units would be done at a time, and each group would take 4-5 weeks with 1 week in between groups to move tenants out of apartments.

Mr. Stogner advised Council that there are HUD emergency grants for which the City can apply to defray the cost of this rehabilitation project.

In a discussion about the number of units scoped for the project Dr. Scott explained that with inspections it was found that among 20 units identified initially there were some found to be not to be in dire condition.

There also was a discussion between Council and Dr. Scott about the funding level of this capital project. Dr. Scott replied that there is a large portion that Council approved in the FY 2022-23 HUD 5-Year Plan for Capital Projects, but with the possibility of having to completely replace more aspects of the apartments than originally estimated, additional funding will be needed. Council then discussed the scope of work and the capital funds approved thus far.

Councilmember Dry commented that City staff should look into whether the Public Housing units are covered by insurance and whether there might be insurance funds which could be applied. He also commented that Public Housing maintenance staff might need further training to recognize major issues and be able to address them or report them to senior Public Housing staff.

The Mayor asked Mr. Stogner if Council could receive the bid specs with different options for levels of rehab/replacement work. Mr. Stogner demurred and noted that he will meet with the City Manager to confirm which bid process to follow – HUD's or the state's. He asserted since the City had Public Housing as a City department rather than an independent authority state laws on bidding likely will be used, but he wanted confirmation of that before embarking on setting up the bid specs and bid process.

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There being no further discussion, the Mayor called for a motion to adjourn to the regularly scheduled meeting at 6:30 pm in City Hall.

Upon a motion by Councilmember Dry, seconded by Councilmember Aldridge and unanimously carried, the meeting was adjourned.