

**MINUTES OF THE  
REGULAR MEETING OF  
THE HOUSING AUTHORITY OF THE VILLAGE OF OAK PARK  
TUESDAY, OCTOBER 8, 2024  
MILLS PARK TOWER  
7:45 AM**

**OFFICIAL RECORD**

**QUORUM**

**PRESENT:** Commissioners Kelm, Sood, Teitelman, Walz and Chairperson Muse

**ABSENT:** Socall

**STAFF:** Pope, Swaggerty, Carpenter, Cobb, Sinn, and Jones

**GUESTS:** Various Mills Park Tower Residents

Chairperson Muse called the meeting to order at 7:48 AM.

**APPROVAL OF THE SEPTEMBER 10, 2024, OPHA'S REGULAR MEETING MINUTES**

Chairperson Muse asked if there were any corrections to the September 10, 2024, meeting minutes. There were none.

It was moved (Kelm) and seconded (Sood) to approve the September 10, 2024, OPHA regular meeting minutes. The motion passed by unanimous voice vote.

**PUBLIC COMMENT**

Kathy Bradshaw (Apt. 19J):

Ms. Bradshaw expressed concern about the elevator situation in the building. She requested a review of the protocol for emergency procedures, particularly in cases where someone in critical health needs assistance and one of the elevators is out of service. She emphasized the need for a written protocol and requested that it be provided as soon as possible.

Marlene Scott (Apt. 11C):

Ms. Scott expressed concern over a letter published in the *Wednesday Journal*. She stated that she feels safe in the building and mentioned that if the elevators are down, the EMTs would use the stairway. Ms. Scott was particularly bothered by the letter writer's continued use of the word "we" as if to imply that the letter writer was speaking for all of the residents of the building. She stated the letter did not represent her thoughts on the matter. She added that the letter also caused concern among her family and friends about her well-being, which she felt was unnecessary. She acknowledged the need to make adjustments, such as avoiding laundry on

days when an elevator isn't working. She mentioned that residents can still call the office even when it's closed. She asked Director Pope if he plans to respond to the letter.

Director Pope thanked the residents for their comments and assured them that a written response drafted by him and Chairperson Muse would be forthcoming. He emphasized that the safety of MPT residents and guests is of the utmost priority. He provided an update on the ongoing elevator reconstruction, explaining that one elevator is being reconstructed at a time, with the first to be completed in the coming weeks, followed by work on the second. He acknowledged the challenges with the increased demand on the remaining in-service elevator, which has led to outages. He mentioned that they are working with the elevator service company, Suburban Elevator, to address these issues and have scheduled elevator maintenance on Wednesdays at 6:00 AM to prevent unplanned outages. While the process is taking time, he stressed that efforts are being made to accelerate the work wherever possible. He also highlighted that they have implemented an instant text messaging system to notify residents of planned outages and other important updates and encourages more residents to sign up for this messaging system. Finally, he acknowledged the frustration around the delays but asked for continued patience, reiterating that a written response to the concerns would be provided.

Rev Doris Merrit-White (Apt. 14D):

Reverend White expressed her concerns about several topics. She mentioned that the Book Table (bookstore) will be closing at the end of November, and hoped that the owner, Jason, would still be available to guide and direct her to books pertaining to important and worthwhile issues.

Additionally, she emphasized the importance of voter registration, sharing that the Westside Health Authority has published materials related to voting, which she will pass along to MPT Manager, Cynthia. Reflecting on the historical significance of this time, she urged everyone to educate, expose, and encourage others to vote. Lastly, she requested prayers for the recovery of her son who had suffered a serious head injury.

Nora Natof (Apt. 9F):

Ms. Natof shared her own experience with the elevators over the weekend. She explained that when pressing the elevator button, the light would go on and then off, preventing the elevator from stopping at her floor unless she held the button down. Although some residents figured out that holding the button would eventually make the elevator stop, others remained stuck in their apartments because they didn't know this workaround. Ms. Natof then shared that workers from Suburban Elevator advised her to hold the button, which resolved the issue, but this contradicts management's instructions not to hold or press the button repeatedly. She pointed out that communication between those doing the reconstruction and those maintaining the operational elevator seems to differ. Her comment highlighted the confusion and inconsistency in instructions received and the need for better communication to prevent further issues.

Charlene Lloyd (Apt. 11H):

Ms. Lloyd, Residence Council President, raised concerns about the ongoing elevator issues and the need for better communication between management and residents. She described an incident where an emergency vehicle was trying to assist a resident, but the elevators were down, leading to a growing crowd in the lobby. She expressed frustration over the lack of immediate action. She stated that it took an hour and a half for the situation to be addressed, despite previous assurances that the non-operational elevator could be activated in emergencies. She was also concerned about the inconsistency between the information provided by Suburban Elevator workers and management. She stated this only increased everyone's frustration. She urged management to issue an impact statement and ensure their communication aligns with Suburban Elevator's instructions. She stated that many residents, including Resident Council members are no longer listening to management because of the conflicting messages and unresolved issues. She asked that management schedule a sit-down meeting with Suburban Elevator management and residents to address concerns and provide clear understanding of the elevator issues and when they would be resolved.

Chairperson Muse acknowledged residents' frustrations, particularly the communication failures. She apologized for the inconvenience residents have faced. She agreed that the management team needs to gather more reliable information from Suburban Elevator and ensure it reaches the residents as quickly as possible. She also asked Ms. Lloyd to clarify her request for a sit-down meeting.

Ms. Lloyd recommended that management hold a mandatory all-resident meeting to disseminate critical information regarding the elevator situation. She stressed that this would prevent the piecemeal sharing of information that causes confusion among residents. Ms. Lloyd mentioned that recent communications, including that of the text emergency alert system, were unclear and led to further misunderstandings. She noted that staff should all be on the same page in their communication with residents regarding the elevators. She said receiving different information from various staff just added to the residents' confusion. She reiterated that a unified approach through an all-resident meeting would help stop rumors and ensure everyone is on the same page. Ms. Lloyd asked that communication be thorough and accessible to all residents. She recommended using multiple channels, including text messages, emails, and physical notices delivered under doors, to ensure every resident is informed. She pointed out that not all residents are tech-savvy or have access to mobile phones, so written communications should be considered as well. Ms. Lloyd also suggested providing continuous updates, rather than waiting for monthly meetings, to inform residents about the elevator repairs, timelines, and ongoing conversations with the contracted elevator company, Suburban Elevator. She further proposed biweekly updates or a newsletter to keep residents up-to-date and suggested that management track who is receiving these communications to ensure broad outreach. She concluded by saying that once the information is distributed, it becomes the residents' responsibility to read and understand it.

Chairperson Muse thanked Ms. Lloyd's for her input.

Linda Harris (Apt. 4F):

Ms. Harris suggested improving communication within the building by using the intercom system, if it's operational, to notify residents about important updates. She expressed uncertainty about the feasibility but raised it as a possible solution for building-wide communication.

Director David Pope clarified that although an intercom system is installed, it is currently non-functional. He mentioned that previous efforts to repair it, including work by an electrician, were unsuccessful. Ms. Carpenter confirmed that the intercom hasn't been used during her tenure and isn't operational at this time, indicating that further checks would be needed to assess its functionality for building-wide communication.

John Reeves (Apt 19L):

Mr. Reeves expressed concerns about building safety and elevator issues. He said that emergency procedures were unclear and questioned the purpose of the red emergency phone. He also noted experiencing instability in the elevator, which caused him to almost fall, exacerbating his existing back issues. Mr. Reeves emphasized the need for a quicker response to these issues, urging management to think about their own families and how they would want them to be treated in situations like this.

Chairperson Muse thanked Mr. Reeves and acknowledged the importance of residents feeling both safe and supported in light of the ongoing elevator issues. She committed to scheduling a resident meeting with management and the elevator company, Suburban Elevator, to discuss solutions and ensure transparency. She emphasized the board's dedication to holding the repair team accountable and reiterated that residents' safety is a priority. She stated that the Board had specifically solicited and approved the elevator reconstruction out of safety concerns, and they suggested that once the new elevator is complete, there should be a session to familiarize residents with its features to avoid confusion.

Resident David Kelm (Apt 12D)

Mr. Kelm suggested that the new text notification system for the elevators should inform residents not only when the elevator is down but also when it is back in service. He compared it to a "yes/no" indicator, like a postal notification system, to ensure residents have clear updates. Additionally, Mr. Kelm questioned the continued use of A+ Cleaning since they provide poor service while on-staff cleaner James does a much better job. Lastly, he inquired about the possibility of trimming trees overhanging the back parking lot to prevent potential car damage from falling branches during high winds.

Director Pope explained the existing emergency response protocols, which include outreach to fire, police, and EMS and coordination with Suburban Elevator. He mentioned that an intercom is required by the fire department, though he wasn't certain if it is currently functioning. He stated we hope to improve resident communication through a new instant text and email system.

He then estimated that the first elevator should be operational in about four weeks, with work on the second elevator starting immediately afterward and expected to take 12-16 weeks. He stated that the primary challenge is the outdated backend electronics and this transition period of needing to maintain the old system before fully switching over to the new system. He said the transition to the new electronic system is essential and will provide long-term functionality and overall elevator performance.

Chairperson Muse thanked residents for sharing their elevator-related concerns and confirmed the board's commitment to addressing the issues. She thanked Reverend Dora for highlighting the importance of voting in the upcoming November election and offered prayers for her and her son. Chairperson Muse concluded by noting that follow-up actions for the elevator issues are in place and stating she looks forward to continued collaboration with residents.

Chairperson Muse asked if there were any further public comments. There were none.

### **3<sup>rd</sup> QUARTERLY FINANCIALS REVIEW**

Mr. Sinn provided an update on the third-quarter financials, noting that rent and operating subsidies for Mills Park Tower are in line with the budget. He added that building expenses, particularly electricity, are slightly over budget, with quarterly HVAC, plumbing, and elevator maintenance and emergency repairs. He reported that overall, expenses remain manageable. He further reported that the Main Offices and Sojourner House and the HCV Program are all in line with the budget. He asked if there were any questions.

Commissioner Teitelman asked if the ROSS Service Coordinator Grant was now in a renewal process or did we need to reapply as a new grant. He noted that the grant submission was due on September 30<sup>th</sup>. Executive Director Pope explained that the ROSS Coordinator Grant application was submitted in September as a renewal. He added that the renewal process should improve our chances of securing funding.

### **DEPARTMENTAL REPORTS**

#### **MPT REPORT**

Property Manager, Carpenter briefly summarized the Mills Park Tower occupancy, leasing, resident demographics, waiting list, building activities, and maintenance for the month of September. She noted a September occupancy rate of 93% and stated staff was continuing to process 13 individuals pulled from the waiting list in August. She reported that three of the 13 had accepted units, one declined to move at this time, and two individuals were withdrawn from the waiting list. She further reported 35 requests for applications, of which eight had been submitted.

Commissioner Kelm inquired if a coupling on the pump had caused the recent water outage. Director David Pope explained that while new shaft couplings had been installed on domestic

pump #1, they were not the cause of the outage. He stated that the recent outage was due to a malfunction of the primary pump system and that maintenance personnel had performed a manual shift to the secondary pump which restored the water. He added that maintenance recently installed a new metering faucet in common areas and completed repairs in the laundry and kitchen areas.

### HCV REPORT

Ms. Cobb, Director HCVP, reported that in September, the lease-up rate reached 99%, with seven lease signings occurring between September 15th and October 1st. This rate may fluctuate slightly if there are changes in the status of program participants. She reported a total of 58 Mainstream vouchers have been issued, including nine in the past two months. She reported there were four NED vouchers in use. She reported that 27 referrals for FYI vouchers had been received with one person leasing on September 16th. She added that this adjustment would be captured in the next report.

### HCVP WAITLIST UPDATE

Ms. Cobb reported that the 2022 waiting list was completed with the last two applicants scheduled for lease-up within the current month. She reported that there are currently 150 applicants on the 2024 waiting list which is expected to take two years to service. Appointments for waiting list applicants' final eligibility will be scheduled gradually, possibly calling in about 10 applicants at a time as vouchers become available.

### **OLD BUSINESS**

NONE

### **NEW BUSINESS**

There was a brief discussion regarding the recent testing of Oak Park housing providers by the civil rights advocacy organization HOPE Fair Housing Center. Executive Director Pope explained that the testing, commissioned by the Village of Oak Park, largely focused on whether Oak Park housing providers violated county, state or federal fair housing laws by discriminating against applicants based on income or criminal history. He shared that the testing also reported resistance to voucher programs due to perceived difficulties, such as managing utilities. This aligns with prior discussions between Director Pope and the OPHA Board about these challenges, and Director Pope acknowledged that such a presentation would be beneficial for the Board of Commissioners, providing insights to improve community engagement and the Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) program.

## **ADJOURNMENT OF OCTOBER 8, 2024, REGULAR MEETING**

Chairperson Muse asked for a motion to adjourn the October 8, 2024, regular meeting.

It was moved (Sood) and seconded (Walz) to adjourn to the October 8, 2024, regular meeting. The motion passed by unanimous voice vote. The meeting was adjourned at 8:54 AM.

Respectfully submitted,

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Andrew Teitelman, Secretary