

**TO:**

North/Northeast Strategy Oversight Committee, Bishop S. Holt, Chair  
Portland Housing Bureau; Molly Rogers, Interim Director  
Joint Office of Homeless Services; Shannon Singleton, Interim Director

**FROM:**

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**SUBJECT:**

**Residents report urgent concerns about management and resident services in affordable housing in N/NE Strategy**

**Summary: Management and resident services inadequacy in preference policy buildings is at a crisis level; residents want participation and accountability**

The N/NE Preference Policy research study is focused on the experiences of residents returning to or seeking stable residents in North and Northeast Portland through the inter-generational preference policy. We have reported on residents' views of their neighborhoods and the anti-displacement goals of the policy.

This memo focuses on a set of significant issues that have been brought to researchers' attention during the study from residents who report serious issues with property management, maintenance, and resident services in all of the preference policy buildings. The problems with safety, facilities and accessibility, basic rent processing, and staff communications are overwhelming. As the team has conducted surveys, interviews, and focus groups with residents, discussions about community and neighborhood have been largely overshadowed by the fundamental problems with stability, security, and well-being in the buildings. Furthermore, residents report having very little contact with staff or opportunity to participate in building governance, community-building, or to get a response to basic questions and concerns about the building.

The N/NE Preference policy research team collected data from residents housed through the Preference Policy at all 7 buildings, covering at least one-third of residents in each building with a total of over 200 resident contacts through surveys, interviews, and focus groups. The research project also includes a monthly meeting of the Research-2-Action team, a group of resident advisors who serve as a sounding board for the research we are collecting and a venue for discussing resident proposals for improvement.

This memo summarizes findings about resident-reported problems, and presents the proposals and recommendations we heard from residents both in data collection and on the R2A about how Portland Housing Bureau, the Joint Office of Homeless Services, and housing providers in the N/NE Strategy can begin to provide accountability and appropriate care for residents. These ideas are framed in the concept of trauma-informed care, in order to recognize that the N/NE Strategy must respond to the intergenerational legacy of displacement and traumatic “root shock” experienced by residents of color in Portland.

## **Residents identify significant issues in all N/NE strategy buildings**

The following problem areas have been identified by PP residents, and are presented in the memo in this order:

- Safety and Security
- Physical Building Facilities
- Property Management
- Resident Crisis Response

While problems in every area were reported in all the buildings, where we have particularly heard of a problem in one or some buildings, that is denoted by building names in parenthesis.

## **Safety and Security is the top concern for residents**

The dominant issue in all interactions with residents is safety and security. Residents report break-ins, physical violence including domestic/partner violence among their neighbors, active drug dealing, and gun violence. There are also issues with fire and fire alarms. Limited security personnel on site, particularly after business hours, is cited as a problem by many residents.

- Domestic violence in neighboring units has created danger ( King & Parks, Beatrice Morrow)
- Active drug dealing, drug use, and gun violence (Beatrice Morrow & Renaissance Commons)

- Insecure physical properties has allowed for break-ins
  - Non-residents climb gates (Rutherford)
  - Locks, doors, gates are not secure (Rutherford, Renaissance Commons, King & Parks)
- Fire alarms are repeatedly going off at night; without staff or fire department response, residents do not get an ‘all clear’ to return.(Renaissance Commons, Beatrice Morrow)
  - Lack of fire department response due to repeated false alarms (Beatrice Morrow)
  - Disabled residents must wait for rescue on stair landings without communication of false alarms (Beatrice Morrow)

### **Physical Building Facilities do not support safety, access, and health**

Along with insecure locks and gates, residents report problems with maintenance, cleaning, disability access, mail facilities, and blocked access to community spaces. While many describe their buildings as having nice, new facilities, residents have also become disillusioned due to a lack of access to empty community rooms and the failure to maintain the buildings.

- Maintenance and cleaning in common areas is insufficient (King & Parks, Beatrice Morrow, Renaissance Commons)
- Disabled accessibility
  - All doors on property are not ADA accessible (Rutherford & Renaissance Commons)
  - Handicapped parking is being taken by non-placarded vehicles without a response from property managers
- Access to mail
  - No package locked box has led to mail theft (Rutherford, Renaissance Commons, King & Parks)
  - After having the wrong mailing address for the building, due to locked lobby and no staff presence, mailman couldn’t get into the building and many residents never received their mail (King & Parks)
- Residents are unable to access community spaces in buildings. Community rooms and kitchens remain locked and unused in most buildings.
  - Empty ground floor commercial space is also noted (Beatrice, King & Parks)

### **Property Management is dysfunctional in basic ways**

Property management is not performing basic property functions in certain buildings nor addressing residents' concerns which has only been exacerbated by high staff turnover. As a result, some residents fear losing their housing stability.

### *Rent accounting practices are poor, including leading to termination notices*

Residents are not receiving confirmation of rent paid and do not have secure payment methods in several buildings. Most distressing, property management staff are not processing rent deposits in Renaissance Commons, where residents have received wrongful eviction notices in at least two separate months.

- Residents have reported that on more than one occasion they have been served with an eviction notice due to rent checks not being processed by property managers correctly or on time (Renaissance Commons)
- No secure payment methods (such as online or inside the office) or receipts available
- Rent has been increased to the maximum allowable under state law without any explanation as to why (Beatrice Morrow)

### *Staff Accessibility and Communication with Residents is Poor*

Staff communication with residents is inadequate or inappropriate which has led to poor relationships between staff and residents. Routinely, staff are not available to respond to resident crises or state they are unavailable when they are on-site and have limited hours.

- Property management staff are inaccessible, unresponsive, or not in the office during posted hours (Renaissance, Rutherford, Beatrice Morrow, King & Parks)
- Lack of on-call staff for evening or weekend problems
- Poor communications, rudeness, lack of professionalism in keeping resident information confidential, and frequent staff turnover are disruptive to relations with residents (Renaissance Commons, Beatrice Morrow, King & Parks)
- Communication via notes left on doors, reminiscent of eviction notices, is especially unwelcome
- Most buildings are not having any resident meetings with property managers or programming by resident services staff.
  - While residents recognize Covid-19 as a reason for curtailing meetings, they also have no way to express concerns, meet one another, or meet staff
  - Children's programming is especially noted as missing

### *Tenant Screening and placement is unclear*

Preference policy residents are concerned by screening during unit turnover that appears to not prioritize historically displaced applicants; and are troubled by a lack of equity in the selection process between program types.

- Tenant screening and selection has been different for Preference Policy residents than other program rules in buildings, leading to a feeling of extra scrutiny for preference policy applicants (Rutherford, Renaissance Commons, King & Parks, Beatrice Morrow)
- Residents report a lack of transparency and communication in knowing if new neighbors are part of the preference policy and promises to provide housing for those historically tied to N/NE (Beatrice Morrow, King & Parks)
- Nepotism in allotting units/services (Beatrice Morrow, King & Parks)

## **Resident Crisis Response**

Preference Policy residents report that there are many neighbors who appear to need much greater services, supports, and crisis response in the buildings. Some of these neighbors were placed through ‘permanent supportive housing,’ (PSH) but service staff are not regularly on-site and there is no crisis response contact for those residents available to neighbors. In several buildings, residents report a hesitance to call police when there are crises related to mental health or domestic violence, but have no alternatives. There are certainly residents experiencing various crises, substance abuse problems, domestic violence, and mental health issues who are not part of a PSH placement. These residents also need greater care and access to support.

- Preference Policy residents were surprised by having ‘high needs’ neighbors and received no information about what programs/supports were going to be available to address needs
- Residents report that supportive housing services staff have minimal to no on-site presence and no crisis contact information. In particular, residents do not know who to contact for a non-police intervention. (Beatrice Morrow, Rutherford, Garlington, King & Parks, Magnolia II, Renaissance Commons, Songbird)

## **Problems in N/NE Strategy buildings are creating trauma for residents**

An important framework for understanding residents’ experiences, both with the historical of urban renewal and displacement, and with the N/NE strategy housing, is *trauma*. The R2A Team has been discussing the concept of trauma and trauma-informed care as a framework for talking about the problems in the housing and neighborhoods. Trauma, in this social, community, and institutional context, means:

- Lack of safety and security
- Lack of transparency and communication in decision-making
- Lack of opportunities to collaborate in problem-solving or governance
- Lack of peer and mutual support and care

The impact of trauma is broad, deep and life-shaping. For example, trauma impairs memory, concentration, new learning and focus; trauma has been correlated to heart disease, obesity, addiction, pulmonary illness, diabetes, autoimmune disorders, cancer; trauma impacts an individual's ability to trust, cope, form health relationships; and trauma shapes a person's belief about self and others, one's ability to hope, and one's outlook on life.

Leaders in the community and in government have repeated that the N/NE strategy is meant to repair past harms, and that it should be a new model that promises made by the City will be kept. Unfortunately, for many residents, they are experiencing new forms of trauma due to the problems with affordable housing provided through the strategy.

In the research interviews and surveys, we heard residents saying things like:

- “I couldn't wait to get here and now I can't wait to leave”
- “My kids aren't safe” and “they shouldn't be exposed to this”
- “Residents are tired of sleepless nights [due to violence in neighboring units]. It's traumatizing”
- “It [violence] makes me not want to live here but where do I go? You just trade one building for another or leave but then you lose your housing/subsidy”
- “Your community is hurting based on what you're not doing”
- “Doesn't feel like community” and “Nothing at all is being done to connect residents and build community”

### *Trauma-Informed Care*

A framework of trauma-informed care can inform providers and PHB in ways to improve housing and programming to address the dimensions of trauma experienced by residents in preference policy buildings. A definition for trauma-informed care is: “a strengths-based framework that is grounded in an understanding of and responsiveness to the impact of trauma, that emphasizes physical, psychological, and emotional safety for survivors, and that creates opportunities for survivors to rebuild a sense of empowerment” (Hopper, Bassuk, & Olivet, 2010).<sup>1</sup>

To be trauma-informed requires an understanding that current services can retraumatize individuals. Tangible ways to create this approach are: to treat each resident as an individual, not a number; provide residents with opportunities to give feedback about their experiences; provide clear and consistent information; involve residents in decision making; and to listen to their concerns and take action. Property management and services can be trauma-informed by committing to restore a sense of safety, power, and worth within residents.

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<sup>1</sup> Hopper, E. K., Bassuk, E. L., & Olivet, J. (2010). Shelter from the storm: Trauma-informed care in homelessness services settings.

## Residents Propose Ways to Address Property Management and Service Issues

The Research-2-Action team discusses resident proposals for action on a monthly basis. These ideas emerge from research surveys, interviews, and focus groups, as well as R2A members' experiences and casual conversations with their neighbors. Residents propose that going forward providers ensure accountability, transparency, and the opportunity to participate in governance and mutual care per trauma-informed care guidelines.

### *Residents' proposals for action and accountability*

- Housing providers meet with residents in each building to hear more about their concerns and to propose concrete actions for improvement. There are many suggestions that residents have shared and would like to be able to propose for their buildings and communities. Priority areas for action are:
  - Safety and security plans
  - On-site property management that is professional and responsive
  - Resident access to community spaces for meetings and community building
- Providers return to the N/NE Oversight Committee (OC) with specific plan to address issues presented above and communicate details of implementation, along with a plan to report back on improvements for accountability over time
  - Regular reporting on conditions from residents to the OC
- Create a Resident Council for N/NE strategy buildings with representation from residents, for longer term accountability
  - Staffing and support for participation must be provided