

NEW BEDFORD, MASSACHUSETTS

MEETING: COMMITTEE ON APPOINTMENTS & BRIEFINGS

DATE: JUNE 28, 2022

TIME: 7:00 P.M.

PLACE: CITY COUNCIL CHAMBER, ROOM 214, MUNICIPAL BUILDING

PRESENT: COUNCILLORS NAOMI CARNEY, CHAIRPERSON; DEREK BAPTISTE, VICE CHAIRMAN; IAN ABREU; SHANE BURGO; HUGH DUNN; MARIA GIESTA; BRIAN GOMES; SCOTT LIMA; WILLIAM BRAD MARKEY; LINDA MORAD; RYAN PEREIRA

ABSENT: NO ONE

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Councillor Carney called the Appointments & Briefings Committee Meeting to order and took attendance; no one was absent.

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Notice, City Clerk of reference of a WRITTEN MOTION, Councillor Gomes, requesting, that the Committee on Appointments and Briefings meet with the residents of Melville Towers, to discuss the ongoing problem of the elevators being down and out of order, making it an unsafe situation for daily use or if need be, evacuation; and further, to also discuss with residents any other safety concerns they may have, and that this meeting be held at the Melville Towers Community Room making it convenient for the residents and that the Commissioner of Inspectional Services, the Director of the Health Department and a representative of the Police Department be invited to this meeting along with management of Melville Towers, and further, that the same course of action be taken on behalf of the residents at Tripp Towers to address public safety along with building and maintenance concerns; and further, that the Department of Inspectional Services and the Health Department inspect both buildings for safety and health concerns immediately, and that both departments report back to the Committee on Appointments and Briefings with their findings before the meeting is held with the residents (To be Referred to the Committee on Appointments and Briefings.) (Ref'd 01/13/2022) was received and placed on file by Councillor Gomes and seconded by Councillor Giesta.

On motion by Councillor Abreu and seconded by Councillor Giesta, the Committee VOTED: To receive and place on file the reports from the Department of Inspectional Services and the Health Department.

The Clerk read into the record a letter from the residents of Tripp Towers and a letter from Peabody Properties Management. These two letters were received and placed on file by Councillor Abreu and seconded by Councillor Burgo.

Councillor Gomes asked the Chair if she would allow the residents present to speak. Councillor Carney indicated that each resident who wished to address the Committee would be allotted three (3) minutes.

Councillor Baptiste rose to state that he has personally received several calls from Melville Tower residents (which is in his Ward.) The residents, he went on to say, are concerned for their safety in the building due to various conditions; and many have expressed that they are fearful of retribution from the property's management if they speak out about the issues they are facing.

Councillor Pereira rose to state that he wants the residents of both buildings – and all residents of such housing complexes – to realize that the City Council is there for them, encouraging the residents of Tripp Towers in particular to call him directly should they ever need anything or have a question.

Several residents of Melville Towers rose to address the Committee. Collectively, they complained of various problems and shortcomings in the building. Issues included the following:

- Not being able to use the kitchen
- The lobby bathroom being locked and not available for use by residents
- Tenant-Management meetings have been discontinued
- "Pull Cords" in apartments are not connected directly to 911
- No handicap-accessible ramp at the building's rear entrance
- Residents are charged for things they should not be, for example: \$25 for wearing pajamas in the hallways and \$50 for being "locked out"
- The Pool Table in the Community Room is ripped up and unusable
- Threats of violence from other tenants, which the Office disregards
- Drugs being rampant in the building including Crack Cocaine
- The smell of burning plastic – as a result of the Crack Cocaine use
- Cigarette smoking inside the building
- The Library is constantly locked and unavailable for residents to use
- Residents are charged \$75 to throw away box springs/mattresses
- There are cracks in the cement, which damages residents' wheelchairs and "rollators"
- Rules are "ridiculous", for example: There is a limit of 14 nights per year that residents are allowed to have overnight guests
- Garbage overflows from the dumpsters regularly
- Residents are charged a fee when they lose the keys to their apartments

Several residents of Tripp Towers then addressed the Committee with the following complaints:

- Non-residents are being allowed into the building at all hours of the night
- Security is insufficient
- Not enough Maintenance staff on duty
- Rodent issues
- Drugs are a major concern
- The trash overflows, builds up and often smells
- Issues/Disagreements/Arguments between tenants
- The elevator often gets stuck – including a time when one tenant was in the elevator for 4 hours
- The picnic table outside is falling apart
- Housing Authority-provided appliances (i.e., refrigerators) are not maintained, repaired, or replaced when needed
- Crime and criminals being let into the building due to lack of security measures

- Lack of a Tenants' Association
- There is no after-hours Emergency Phone Number for tenants to call
- When tenants accidentally lock themselves out of the building there is a \$40 'Lock Out Fee' and usually a 2-3 hour wait
- The back door is ALWAYS propped open
- Delivery package left at tenants' doors are often stolen with no repercussions
- There is no security guard on duty
- The hallways and common areas are very dirty and are never cleaned

Some positive things were stated regarding Tripp Towers as well. These include:

- There are many nice people in the building and on staff
- The Maintenance man is excellent and hardworking, but he needs more help
- The Security Cameras are very good and help some to feel safer

Additionally, the Chair allowed a homeowner in the area of Satellite Village in the far north end to speak as well about his concerns at that Housing Authority location. They are as follows:

- More Security is needed
- Lots of speeding – especially near Campbell School
- Regular damage to private property
- Littering
- Illegal motorcycles/ATV's/dirt bikes, etc.
- Rat/Rodent problems
- Illegal fireworks
- Pitbulls are permitted to live in the apartments, which should not be the case

Once all who wished to speak had done so, Councillors began to ask questions.

Councillor Lima asked a resident of Melville Towers if he ever sees a police office on the property. The resident responded that "yes, sometimes there is a police office present; but there needs to be a police officer on site 24 hours per day/7 days a week. He stated that Monday through Friday, the officer is there from 4 pm to midnight; and from 8 am to midnight on Saturdays and Sundays.

Councillor Abreu asked Health Director Damon Chaplin to explain what his department does when it receives complaints like the ones they heard tonight.

Damon Chaplin, Health Director, stated that an Inspector is assigned to the complaint, and in the case of the Housing Authority, the City Inspector will check on the complaint along with an inspector from the Housing Authority. Corrective Orders, if necessary, are then issued to the Authority or the Property Management company. He also confirmed that if an appliance, like a refrigerator, is provided by landlord/management company/Housing Authority, then it is that entity's responsibility to repair/replace as needed in a timely manner.

Councillor Gomes asked Director Chaplin if his department can do 'sweeps' of properties, and he responded that they could inspect all common areas at any time but cannot enter individual rental units without permission of the tenants.

Councillor Gomes asked Danny Romanowicz, DIS Commissioner, what his department's plan of action is for these complaints that were brought up tonight. Commissioner Romanowicz stated that they did find various issues, which were noted in the reports that he filed. His inspectors will be going back to follow-up on the corrective action plans. He indicated that his inspectors have been in Tripp Towers several times due to receiving several complaints. However, his team has been told that the elevator operation is not in their purview by State Inspectors.

Commissioner Romanowicz promised that if residents call his office 'today', someone will be there 'the next day'.

Councillor Gomes then thanked all the Department Heads and Lt. Carola for attending and taking notes on the issues raised this evening. He encouraged the residents to call their City Councillors for any reason whatsoever and encouraged them to not fear any retaliation from their property's management.

On a related motion by Councillor Pereira and seconded by Councillor Gomes, the Committee VOTED: That the Housing Authority's Board of Commissioners and the Management Team of Peabody Properties for Melville Towers be invited to appear before the Committee on Appointments & Briefings in order to address the issues that were raised by tenants at this meeting. This motion passed on a Roll Call Vote of Yeas 11, Nay 0.

On a related motion by Councillor Pereira and seconded by Councillor Gomes, the Committee VOTED: That the entire City Council tour both properties within 90 days. This motion passed on a voice vote.

On motion by Councillor Morad and seconded by Councillor Gomes, the Committee VOTED: To recommend to the City Council to take "No Further Action" on the WRITTEN MOTION, Councillor Gomes, requesting, that the Committee on Appointments and Briefings meet with the residents of Melville Towers, to discuss the ongoing problem of the elevators being down and out of order, making it an unsafe situation for daily use or if need be, evacuation; and further, to also discuss with residents any other safety concerns they may have, and that this meeting be held at the Melville Towers Community Room making it convenient for the residents and that the Commissioner of Inspectional Services, the Director of the Health Department and a representative of the Police Department be invited to this meeting along with management of Melville Towers, and further, that the same course of action be taken on behalf of the residents at Tripp Towers to address public safety along with building and maintenance concerns; and further, that the Department of Inspectional Services and the Health Department inspect both buildings for safety and health concerns immediately, and that both departments report back to the Committee on Appointments and Briefings with their findings before the meeting is held with the residents. This motion passed on a voice vote.

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The Committee took a brief recess as many left the Chamber.

Notice, City Clerk of reference of a COMMUNICATION, Mayor Mitchell, to City Council, submitting the APPOINTMENT of EMILY ARPKE as CITY AUDITOR (Ref'd 06/09/2022) was received and placed on file by Councillor Morad and seconded by Councillor Markey. (2)

Emily Arpke was present and addressed the Committee. She explained that she has both a BA and an MBA in Public Administration and, through her work as the COO in the Brockton Redevelopment Authority, and she has 'fallen in love with France'. She is familiar with the City of New Bedford through her current work and is very excited to join the team here.

In response to a question from Councillor Abreu, Ms. Arpke stated that she can provide a different perspective to City Auditing than others have traditionally held, but she looks forward to bringing the Office and the City forward with new, yet sound, practices. She believes it will be a very smooth transition for her to go from COO to City Auditor, one reason being is that she currently performs many CFO level tasks in her current position.

Councillor Markey asked if she intended to continue her education and training within her field. Ms. Arpke indicated that she loves to learn and will absolutely be doing so, not only for her own benefit but for the City's as well.

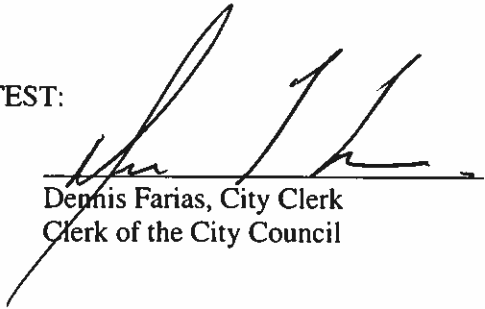
Both current Auditor Bob Ekstrom and Michael Gagne, CFO, spoke about how highly impressed they both are with Ms. Arpke's qualifications, background, personality, and ability to be the next City Auditor for New Bedford.

On motion by Councillor Pereira and seconded by Councillor Markey, the Committee VOTED: To recommend to the City Council APPROVAL of the APPOINTMENT of EMILY ARPKE as CITY AUDITOR. This motion passed on a voice vote.

Councillor Pereira made a motion to adjourn, which was seconded by Councillor Markey.

This meeting adjourned @ 8:51 p.m.

ATTEST:



Dennis Farias, City Clerk
Clerk of the City Council