

Mission Main Tenants Demand Answers—And Emergency Plan

BY DUKE HARTEN

A pipe bomb, a fire, a flood. Tough to deal with for anybody—tougher still if you can't walk down a flight of stairs.

In 2007, authorities responded to a bomb scare at the Mission Main housing complex. With elevators deactivated and a number of residents bedridden, evacuation was anything but routine. The building, a midrise apartment complex with 120 single-bedroom units, houses mostly disabled or elderly tenants.

Though nobody was hurt, the botched evacuation concerned residents: What would happen in the event of a fire or a flood? There needed to be a crisp, effective plan for immediate and full evacuation of the building.

The Mission Main Concerned Residents Committee (MMCRC) began to petition management for an evacuation protocol. Established in 1998, the MMCRC functions

member of MMCRC, "The fire at Wardman Apartments in October 2011 was the impetus for the second petition because, one, it is also a Winn-managed property, and two, Winn Management sent Mission Main residents a memo informing residents that they were responsible for their own property in the event of a fire or flood."

Despite gathering over 500 signatures for their petition from residents and local politicians, MMCRC was not satisfied. The group contacted Captain David Cushing of the Boston Fire Department as well as Mayor Menino's office. Shortly thereafter an abatement order was issued for non-compliance with fire safety codes.

This past February 23, Boston Fire Department and the MMCRC gave a presentation about the ongoing safety dilemma, and management followed up with a brief summary of an evacuation plan. Residents felt it was not comprehensive enough. The sentiment would prove true just three weeks later.

May 14 introduced a new issue to the residents of Mission Main. A fifth-floor sprinkler malfunctioned during an annual inspection and began spewing water. Maintenance personnel could not get into the mechanical room to turn off the flow, and neither the front desk nor security had a key to the room. Management was, at the time, literally out to lunch. When they couldn't be reached, the fire department had to break down the door to gain access to the room.

The fifth-floor unit was flooded, and water damage extended to an adjacent apartment, both elevators and the lobby of the building. Elevators were out of service for a day; the resident was displaced from her unit; and the fire department had to post a round-the-clock supervisor at Mission Main because the alarm box was

fried.

MMCRC insists that had its demand for a comprehensive evacuation plan been met, there would have been a key behind the desk as well as a list of all disabled residents who might need assistance in a similar scenario. Residents are concerned now about mold and mildew stemming from the flood. They also want to know who is responsible for property damaged in the flood. Winn has not held a meeting addressing any concerns to date.

Mission Main is funded under the federal HOPE VI program, which provides grants to housing authorities for rehabilitation of distressed housing. The Boston Housing Authority (BHA) won a 1993 HOPE VI grant for Mission Main. Though funded with federal money, the development is managed privately by Winn Management.

Duke Harten lives on Mission Hill.



Resident Gloria Murray helped found MMCRC.

as an *ad hoc* volunteer resident advocacy group. The group demanded a comprehensive, bilingual, written plan available to all residents—and responding authorities—in the event of an emergency.

Winn Management, the firm that manages Mission Main, dragged its feet. Time passed, and the plan was forgotten until a 2011 fire reignited the committee's determination to draft a protocol.

This time there were no half-measures. The fire, which on October 17 tore through Roxbury's Wardman Apartments (also managed by Winn), left 13 injured and dozens homeless. The Concerned Residents Committee recognized Mission Main's vulnerability in a similar situation and planned a pitch that management would not be able to ignore.

Says Gloria Murray, a founding

Taking a Bite Out of Crime (and Free Eats) National Night Out Turns 30



On Tuesday, August 7, the West Fens will celebrate its 30th Annual National Night Out. The event, held at the Seventh-Day Adventist Church (corner of Peterborough and Jersey Street) from 4:30 to 7:30, will feature live music, a moonwalk for kids, information tables for adults, free food donated by Bradley's Liquor, ice cream, and gift certificates from local businesses, including tickets to Red Sox games, to be raffled off...with all proceeds going to Operation P.E.A.C.E. In the yearly citywide celebration of National Night Out, residents block off part of their neighborhoods to make it safe for everyone. The Peterborough Street Crime Watch Unit will hand out free whistles and info on how to help reduce crime in the neighborhood. Wingate Management (Peterborough Housing), Operation P.E.A.C.E., the church and the Peterborough Street Crime Watch Unit jointly sponsor the event.

— MATTI KNIVA SPENCER

Neighborhood Newsline

COLORADO SHOOTINGS PUSH VIOLENCE COUNTER OVER 5,000

Stop Handgun Violence announced late last month that the electronic counter on its huge billboard overlooking the Mass Pike—which has tracked the number of children



and teens killed by firearms since the 2010 mid-term elections—passed the 5,000 mark as a result of the cineplex shootings in Aurora, Colorado on July 21. "Is it any wonder that we are mourning the victims of yet another mass shooting in this country when we still have unrestricted access to guns in 33 states—including Colorado, which requires no background checks on private gun sales?" asked John Rosenthal, chair of the group. On average, Rosenthal said, 83 Americans are killed by guns every day.

LOLLAPALOOZA SCHOLARSHIPS

A native of Lima, Peru, has won the first-ever Berklee Lollapalooza Endowed Scholarship, after a six-month period of auditions and interviews in 20 US cities. Guitarist and songwriter David Stewart will receive a four-year, full-tuition grant. He has already

> NEWSLINES on page 2

Wentworth Awaits BRA's Sign-off on Proposed Huntington Avenue Dorm



Wentworth pins its hopes on a new dorm and upgrades of existing housing (shown here) to lure more students out of neighborhood housing.

BY SHENEAL PARKER

Wentworth Institute of Technology (WIT) continues to move forward in its effort to build new dormitories and reduce the economic and social impact of students living off-campus in the Fenway and Mission Hill. At a public meeting on July 19 the school presented updates of its institutional master plan (IMP), which includes four other projects as well as the proposed student housing.

The dormitory is planned for 525 Huntington Ave., currently a landscaped open space owned by Wentworth and bounded by Vancouver and Louis Prang streets and Huntington Ave. The dorm will be designed to enhance

the campus experience by attracting Wentworth juniors and seniors to on-campus housing rather than in the neighborhoods.

The proposed building will have 305 beds in apartment-style units on seven floors. The 72 units will consist of 51 four-bed apartments, 20 five-bed apartments, and a resident director's apartment. Each unit will be organized by around a common space with skyline views. No off-street parking will be provided.

Two other buildings in the IMP are scheduled to open in September—the Flanagan Campus Center and the Center for Science and Biomedical Engineering. An addition to the Ira Allen Building is still in the works.

Wentworth and the Boston Redevelopment Authority (BRA) will hold one more public meeting on July 31 from 6 to 7:30pm, and then the BRA will hold a public "scoping session" on August 7 in which the agency comments on the feasibility of the plan. That meeting takes place from 1:30-2:30pm in the BRA Board Room on the 9th floor of City Hall.

Written comments on the Project Notification Form (the dorm proposal) must be received by BRA no later than Monday, August 13. Address comments to Katelyn Sullivan, Boston Redevelopment Authority, One City Hall Square, Boston, MA 02201 or email at Katelyn.Sullivan.bra@cityofboston.gov.

Sheneal Parker lives in the East Fens.