

Green Baxter Court Fire

Extent of Fire

The fire at GBC started in unit 1727 at around 4am on Wednesday January 8th, and the unit was completely destroyed along with 1729. The adjoining units at 1725, 1731, 1733 & 1735 had extensive smoke and water damage. Despite what was reported in the news, most of the families were actually awoken because the children in unit 1725 notified their friends in 1745, who woke up their mom, who got everyone out. Although I originally reported that there were no injuries, there were actually several people who have suffered some side effects from smoke inhalation as well as frostbite. All of whom are under the care of physicians.

Residents indicated that the smoke alarms were going off and the Fire Inspector indicated that the firewalls between units did the job of slowing down the spread of the flames. The insurance company assessed the damage and will pay for the replacement of the building, per our insurance policy.

Day of the Fire

I need to commend all of the people who responded to the fire including GBC residents, Community Action Network (CAN), the Red Cross, the Fire Department and AAHC staff. Reggie Dalton was on-call and was the initial responder from the AAHC. CAN, who provides on-site services at GBC were also immediately on the site to help residents. Several tenants also took in families while they waited for the fire to be put out. The Fire Department staff were all very considerate and as helpful as they could be to the residents. Thank you to Beth Yaroch, Reggie Dalton, Alissa Ellis, Kelly Frazier, Latonya Brown, Weneshia Brand, Brandon Boggs and Lance Mitchell who have all been assisting from the AAHC.

The Red Cross provided debit cards for all of the families to stay at the Hampton Inn for 3 days with additional funds for food and incidentals. The Washtenaw County trauma response team met with both the displaced residents as well as the rest of GBC residents to help them cope with the trauma.

Tenants

I need to give a special thank you to Joan Doughty and CAN staff, who have been working tirelessly to assist tenants rebuild their lives after this devastating fire. Most residents fled in their pajamas without glasses, shoes, prescriptions, and wallets. Offers of assistance have come in from many in the community. Two tenants do have renter's insurance and will be able to get their essentials replaced.

- CAN – assistance with everything: photos for insurance claims, glasses, prescriptions, food, clothing, transportation, cancelling DTE, changing mail address, school liaison, finding permanent housing, applying for DHS State Emergency Relief funds
- Rotary Club North – paying for storage units until residents find permanent housing
- Kiwanis – Furniture and household items
- Red Cross – debit card for hotel, food and immediate clothing needs, nebulizing breathing machine for a tenant, service coordination

- Clague and King School PTO – raising funds for security deposits, insurance deductible for families and other items
- Michigan Municipal League – donations for meals
- M Live/Ann Arbor.com Warm the Children – thousands of dollars in gift certificates for clothing
- Ann Arbor Public Schools –Administrators and teachers met with tenants to assure them that their children would be picked up wherever they are to finish the school year at their existing school and help during the transition
- Payless shoes – gift certificates for free shoes and boots for all family members
- Janis Bobrin – boots for a family member
- Java Jungle – 3 free passes for kids
- Ann Arbor Thrift Store – clothing

Current Living Situation

Tenants are staying at the Microtel until we can either move them into a hotel with full kitchen facilities or permanent housing. Four families have school aged children and want to stay in the same neighborhood so we are looking for both short and long-term housing in the neighborhood. CAN and GBC residents have offered to provide meals for residents until they can get kitchen facilities.

Permanent Housing

The AAHC is working with tenants to find permanent housing with a Housing Choice Voucher. We are reaching out to landlords in the neighborhood whose rents are too high for our vouchers to see if they will bring their rents down so families can stay in the school district. Once the families move-in, they can get their items out of storage and utilize the above resources for replacement items. Many of the families have lost their identification, birth certificates and other essential items needed to rent an apartment. The AAHC has copies of these documents in our files which we hope landlords will accept to speed of the process.

Insurance

The AAHC policy covers the cost to repair or replace the building up to the policy cap, including demolition and any environmental remediation. The policy includes the cost of hotels for the tenants after the first 72 hours, which coincidentally worked out with the Red Cross's 3 night coverage. The policy will cover lost rent to the AAHC and the cost of relocating tenants (moving trucks but not storage). Unfortunately the AAHC policy does not cover tenant household items.

Continuing Needs

At this point the greatest need is for cash donations to pay for meals and other immediate essential items like glasses. I am asking people to make a donation directly to CAN, which can also be done through their website at <http://canannarbor.org/>. The AAHC cannot use HUD funds to cover the tenants daily living costs or replacement items, or CAN staff's overtime. However, the Ann Arbor Housing Development Corporation can and CAN will be making a request.