

June 28, 2007

Editor
The Reporter
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Dear Editor: I am writing to clarify some of the information contained in Tony Di Domizio's article in The Reporter on Pennfield Manor (6/26/07). The Fair Housing Council of Montgomery County is a civil rights organization, its primary purpose is to educate the public about anti-discrimination laws in housing and help enforce these laws. Although we are neither a housing provider nor a social service agency, we are aware of the serious shortage of affordable housing in the region. Therefore when we first learned about the displacement of residents at Pennfield, we offered to help identify resources for the residents of Pennfield and facilitate communication between the new owners and social service, housing and organizations in the community who might be called upon to respond to the needs of Pennfield residents.

We first met with a committee of the North Penn Collaborative to alert them of the situation and to coordinate a response from the North Penn Community. We identified possible resources for those who would be displaced at Pennfield Manor, especially the most vulnerable residents impacted by the planned renovations. We alerted member agencies of the Montgomery County Housing Coalition so they could be prepared to offer assistance to Pennfield residents who contacted them. Following that, we made telephone contact with numerous social service organizations and put together a resource list of agencies that could offer financial or other assistance to those having to move. We took the step of contacting agencies directly so that residents would not waste time making numerous phone calls looking for assistance. The compiled resource list was then distributed to all Pennfield residents; it explained the resource along with a contact name and number.

Along with Karen Kispert, the executive director of Indian Valley Housing Corporation, and North Penn Collaborative representative, we met with two management representatives from Madison, the new owners of Pennfield Manor. Our purpose was to get facts about the timeline for the planned renovations and lease non renewals and to identify any areas on which we could collaborate to ease the transition. Because it was recognized that many residents might need additional time to find alternative housing, Madison offered month to month leases to alleviate the immediate crisis in addition to the 90 day notice of lease non-renewal. They also offered to be flexible with any tenant who was having a difficulty finding a new place to live. Madison informed us that renovations would be staggered and as units were renovated, they would be offered to tenants whose leases had not yet ended. Since that time we have been in contact with the management at Pennfield to monitor the situation and are available to direct people to the appropriate resources so no one falls through the cracks.

In the short term, what we must do is connect individuals and families leaving Pennfield Manor with available resources. It is going to take a collective effort on the part of the housing organizations in the County, the township, and flexibility on the part of the new owners at Pennfield to work with those who are facing a difficult time finding a new home.

While the rents at Pennfield Manor have historically been affordable, it is not subsidized housing. And while some Pennfield residents may need rental subsidies in order to move into a new place, many are working families. There is a housing crisis for many people in our communities - there simply are not enough apartments and houses that people can afford. The issue that needs to be solved is the lack of **affordable, accessible** housing - not just in Hatfield Township, not just in Montgomery County, but in the entire region.

Beth Albert
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