



Published on *East Lansing Info* (<https://eastlansinginfo.org>)

Home > Safety Concerns Raised at Bailey Center Senior Housing

Safety Concerns Raised at Bailey Center Senior Housing ^[1]

Tuesday, December 18, 2018, 9:00 am

By:

Alice Dreger



Above: The Bailey School before renovations began.

When the decision was made to repurpose ^[2] East Lansing's shuttered Bailey Community Center to provide housing for senior citizens, many community members breathed a sigh of relief.

The project, now open, was ultimately set to provide not only housing for seniors ? primarily those with low incomes ? but also a daycare and office space to be occupied by Capital Area Housing Partnership, the local organization leading the HUD-funded project.

But things haven't turned out quite as hoped. Concerns about the building's physical features and about its management company recently piled high enough for seniors living in the building to contact ELi. This special report is a result of our looking into their concerns.

A project with many benefits:

Every resident who spoke with ELi about problems at the Bailey Center emphasized that they

believe it to be, overall, an excellent project.

The new Bailey Center includes 30 modern, high-ceilinged apartments for people aged 55 and up, including 25 that are reserved for people who earn less than the area's average median income. It also has an open daycare [3] now lively with children and teachers, space for community events, and office space on the first floor.

The project, just a few blocks from East Lansing's downtown corridor, is located within the area overseen by the Bailey Neighborhood Association, a group is universally described by Bailey Center residents as warm and welcoming.

The City just announced [4] that the Natural Resources Trust Fund Board has approved a \$219,000 grant to improve the park adjacent to the Center, which means the park is likely to undergo a major renovation soon, improving a major amenity already benefitting the Bailey Center residents.



The project invigorates a property that was closed by a previous City Council because it was costing the City of East Lansing what a majority of that Council [5] believed was too much money to maintain. The City and its taxpayers no longer have to pay to keep up the building. That's now the problem of the Bailey Limited Dividend Housing Association Limited Partnership.

That partnership leases the Bailey Center property (which does not include the park) from the City for \$100 a year under an agreement that is set to last 45-50 years. (View lease. [6])

The partnership is comprised of the nonprofit Capital Area Housing Partnership (CAHP) and P.K. Development Group, a private company that specializes in housing projects funded by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).

CAHP [7] is a well-respected nonprofit organization on whose voluntary Board of Directors [8] Mayor Mark Meadows serves. Rawley VanFossen, Assistant Executive Director of CAHP, told

ELi that CAHP went into partnership with P.K. Development Group on this project because low-income senior housing at Bailey depended on getting funding from HUD and MSHDA [9], the State housing authority, and P.K. had the experience required by HUD and MSHDA for such funding.

But it is the management of the project by P.K.'s employees that has formed the nexus of complaints and concerns expressed by some residents.



A building that still isn't finished:

According to CAHP's VanFossen, the project took longer than anticipated to complete because of lack of qualified construction workers, a problem plaguing development projects statewide [10]. Because seniors needed to move in, they were allowed to do so before the building was complete, starting in May 2018.

VanFossen explains, "It never was the goal to have construction going on with folks living there. We made the call to say we want to move folks in because we know they are excited and looking for homes. Putting it off can make life more troublesome for them than moving in without the building being completed."

But a consequence of this decision was that residents found themselves living in an active construction zone, with major work being done for the commercial space on the first floor and with workers coming into apartments repeatedly to finish work on the residential spaces.

Today, the building is still not finished. It has not been issued the permanent Certificate of

Occupancy (CO) by the City. It has been occupied under a series of temporary CO's as City inspectors have found, month after month, that it still has unaddressed problems that mean that the building is not up to code.

Rhon Koch, a resident who is a wheelchair user, has been particularly frustrated by the curb-cuts for the residential portion for the building, curb cuts which cause challenges for mobility-impaired residents and visitors.



There is no ramp or curb-cut near the front door of the residences (above). Instead, the cut providing a ramp from the walkway level to the parking lot level is halfway-down the parking lot space, and was built in such a way that water pools at the base of the small ramp.

Koch and other residents tell ELi the issue may seem small but is significant for wheelchair and walker users, who are as relatively numerous in this building, as one might expect from a senior housing building. Koch says a bus driver coming to pick her up for dialysis fell and broke a bone when she ended up on ice that had formed where the water pools.

P.K. Construction has been working on revision of that spot, as shown below, and according to Pete Potterpin of P.K. Management, there's only one major thing holding us up in terms of getting the permanent C.O., namely the light fixtures on poles surrounding the building. Those exterior lights are extremely bright what residents say is akin to stadium lighting, troubling not only the residents when they're trying to sleep, but also homeowners nearby.



But ELi obtained a copy of the current temporary C.O. [11] from the City's Building Department, and that document indicates there are more problems than the lights. The conditions of approval also name issues with landscaping, soil erosion, and "Fire rating issue in the public front[;] issue needs to be addressed and inspected."

ELi asked the Building Department what that last item means, but received no response.

A visit to the building suggested there are additional problems not noted on the Certificate of Occupancy, some of them related to the desire to make this a "green" (environmentally responsible) building.

For example, when I stepped off the elevator to visit Koch's apartment on the second floor, I stepped into complete blackness. This interior hallway has no windows, and motion-detectors are supposed to light the hallway when a person is present.

The lights would not go on until Koch had rolled at least 15 feet down the hallway. (She warned me to wait so that I would not fall on a hallway ramp that was not visible.)

The bathrooms in the apartments are also outfitted with a kind of "green" lighting switch that turns the lights off after a set period of time, in some cases, according to residents, only about ten minutes. A resident in the shower or using a toilet longer than that period will find him- or herself in the dark. (There's not a motion-detector on the bathroom lights.)

According to P.K.'s Potterpin and CAHP's VanFossen, residents simply need to make work-order requests to P.K. Management to have these issues fixed. (Potterpin tells ELi that P.K. Construction and P.K. Management are "separate companies with similar ownership.")

According to residents with whom I spoke, asking for fixes of these issues is typically met with either being ignored or told one is asking too much.

A gas leak, and fire alarms that keep going off:

Residents who spoke with ELi all named a gas leak that occurred on July 12, 2018, as emblematic of the fears they have about safety issues with the building.

Potterpin says the problem was caused by a sub-contractor who "bumped" into a gas line so that the gas line had to be shut-off and repaired. He said he thinks that Consumers Energy was called promptly by the contractor, before management was even notified.

But residents say that building workers and residents were raising concerns about a strong gas smell for many days before one of them finally called Consumers Energy. Upon arriving at the scene, Consumers Energy emergently evacuated the building, and residents spent all day outside waiting for the building to be fixed and declared safe.

According to Terry DeDoes, Senior Public Information Director for Consumers Energy, "crews determined that the gas leak was caused by contractors the Center had hired to perform work throughout the complex. A contractor hired by the Center had drilled into an inside natural gas fuel line that was located behind a wall."

DeDoes says, "They found only trace amounts of natural gas inside but wanted to keep residents out of the building until they could confirm each room was safe."

Below: ELFD responding to a call, on Abbot Road, on November 29, 2018 (stock image).



Residents also tell ELi that the automated fire alarms have been going off in the building for no

reason. These are industrial-style alarms designed to rouse one from the deepest slumber, with startling horns and strobe lights.

The alarms automatically call out the East Lansing Fire Department, making it possible for ELi to use the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) to obtain records on these automated calls for false alarms.

Since May 1 of this year, when residents moved in, ELFD records show fifteen automated calls ^[12] ? about every two weeks on average ? with no actual need for emergency aid.

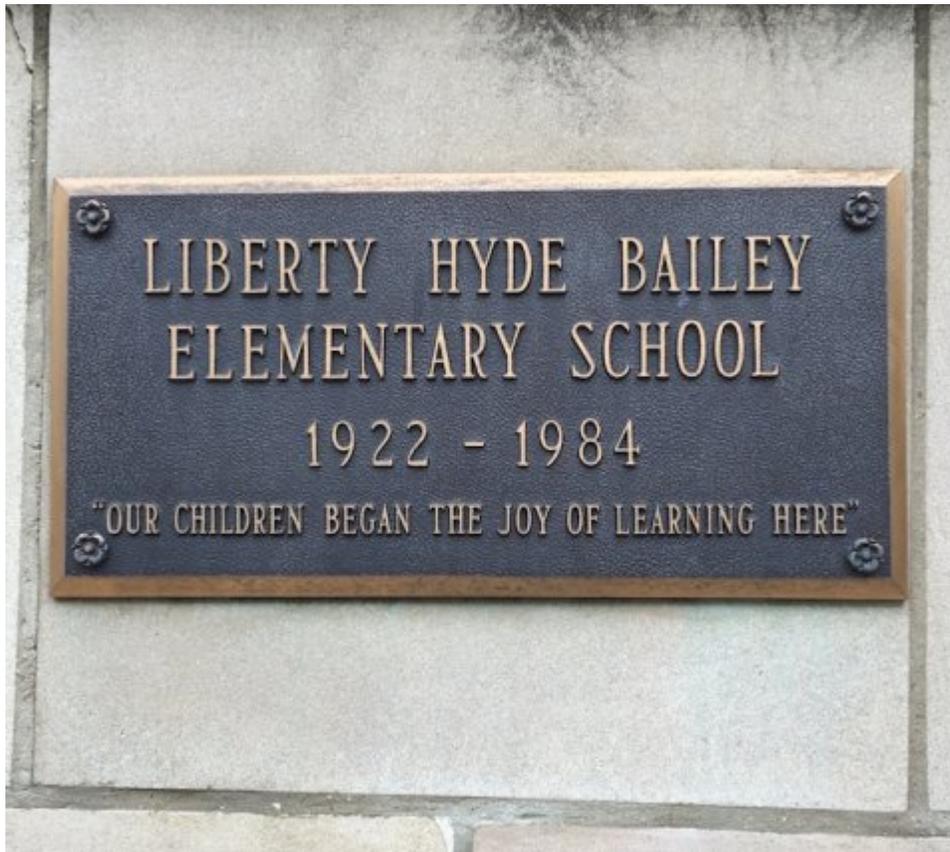
Potterpin told me the false alarms were occurring because of ?dirty smoke detector sensors? which have now been cleaned. He says the problem ?hasn?t happened in some time.?

Records show the most recent false alarm was six days before I interviewed Potterpin.

The project itself does not support the cost of emergency services to the building. In recognition of the project providing a social good of low-income housing, East Lansing?s City Council opted to pass an ordinance ^[13] charging the project only \$100 per year in lieu of property taxes. Other taxpayers bear the cost of emergency services to the building.

?A total disappointment?:

Kate Benington moved into one of the five Bailey Center rental apartments that are market-rate ? that is, not restricted to income-limited individuals. She has lived in East Lansing for fifty-two years, and her daughter actually attended the Bailey School as a child.



Benington sold a house in East Lansing, deciding to move to Bailey rather than another apartment option because the Center is smoke-free ? something that was extremely important to her as a cancer survivor ? and in what she saw as a great location.

But Benington has found the situation ?a total disappointment.? It took months to get her appliances to work, the apartment is smaller than she was led to believe it would be (and smaller than some others), and, most problematically for her, the neighbor below her smokes. (Management is moving to evict that resident for breaking the no-smoking lease.)

Residents told similar stories of frustration, including about a hoarder who has since been evicted, and also named problems with the utility hook-ups. Potterpin told ELi about a screw-up in the metering, which explains why some were presented large bills after months of no bills ? a serious problem for some low-income people, whose bills also should have been adjusted for their income and disability status, if any, had the bills been done correctly. (Some say they faced eviction threats for these bills.)

Like other residents we spoke with, Benington finds P.K. Management to be generally unhelpful. The morning I spoke to Benington, an unknown woman knocked on her door at 7:30 a.m. to ask to use Benington?s phone. The woman indicated she had come to see a man in a nearby apartment but told Benington that ?I wouldn?t have sex with him so he kicked me out and I don?t have anywhere to go.?

Benington says that when she told management about this, the response was that she should not be upset because nothing bad came of the matter. But Benington says this plus ?other

people roaming the halls who don't live here? lead her to feel ?it?s not a safe environment.?

Residents told me of a vagrant being in the building. According to Potterpin, P.K. Management has security cameras operating in the building and has found no evidence of people coming in the building without authorization.

Residents told me they want to put chains on their doors, to be able to open a door without letting someone in, but that they have been told by management that they would have to then pay, when moving, for the entire door frame to be replaced.

When I asked Potterpin about this, he said that chains on doors would represent ?minimal cost and we?d probably pick that [cost] up, no problem.?

But residents say if they ask for help with things like this, or changing batteries on the battery-operated smoke detectors in their apartments ? which are at least ten feet off the floor because of the high ceilings ? management suggests they are bothersome. Some describe struggling simply to get copies of their leases from management.

Below: P.K. Companies' office in Okemos.



In the brief period when CAHP?s offices were located in the Bailey Center, as had been planned for the project, residents sometimes appealed to CAHP personnel for help. But not long after the

project opened, CAHP found it had outgrown the Bailey Center space, and the nonprofit has now moved out, except for a few last pieces of furniture.

As it manages the entire building, P.K. Management will soon be looking to rent out that office space to another commercial tenant.

Interpersonal conflict:

Everyone interviewed for this article spoke of numerous points of interpersonal conflict that have resulted in stress for residents, management, CAHP, and City personnel who deal with building and housing. The situation is tense enough that some residents expressed fear of speaking with ELi, out of concern for backlash from management.

Koch, who is outspoken about complaints, tried to organize a tenants' association to empower residents to bring concerns forward as a group. But she and other residents (who don't want to be named for fear of reprisal) say that Potterpin and others from management showed up to the organizational meeting and effectively stopped the association from forming.

About this meeting, CAHP's VanFossen says that he heard from other residents that they weren't interested in such an association because it would simply turn into a forum for empowering serial complainers.

Asked if he has any problem with residents forming a tenants' association, Potterpin said, "Absolutely not. We encourage that." He says management holds monthly meetings where residents can raise concerns as well as organize social events.

"If they have issues," he says, "they can air them."



Hoping things get better:

Potterpin of P.K. Management told ELi that he's sure there are a couple of folks who are not happy? but that it boils down to a small number who are really unhappy with the amount of rent they are paying, because they believe they should be paying less than they are.

VanFossen of CAHP told ELi that his organization is trying to help make things better.

?We really care about the people who live there, and it really does burden and hurt me to know people are not happy living there. If they're not happy, we try to find a solution,? he says.

VanFossen acknowledges that part of the challenge arises because the building is still under construction, and he hopes things smooth out once it is finished. If it doesn't, CAHP will look into letting people out of their leases if that's what they want.

But residents tell ELi that's not what they want. They think it is basically a good project in a great location. What they want is a building that lives up to code and to community expectations, including having a management system that makes them feel safe.

Asked for his take, Meadows told ELi, ?I am satisfied, as Mayor, that the City made the right decision regarding Bailey when it leased the property to CAHP/PK. As a Board member [of CAHP], I was disappointed about the construction delays and am disappointed that some residents are unhappy. I know that CAHP staff is working to eliminate resident concerns.?

Since being alerted by ELi to specific concerns, Meadows has personally talked to some

residents. Koch says the mayor told her that he would look into some of the issues.

But the lease the City has with the partnership formed between CAHP and PK limits how much the City can do in terms of the larger scheme of the project. Residents have been calling on housing advocates to help them with the particulars.

Know of an issue you believe ELi should investigate? Contact us! [14]

ELi produces nonprofit public service investigative journalism for the people of East Lansing. Donors to ELi make this work possible. If you want us to keep working throughout 2019, please contribute today [15] while we have matching funds!

Related Categories:

Ask ELi to Investigate [16]

City Council [17]

Community [18]

Development and Planning [19]

Finance and Taxes [20]

Government [21]

Historic Structures [22]

Senior Life [23]

ELi is a member of INN and LION Publishers



**Institute for
Nonprofit News**



This news is brought to you by our financial supporters!

Source URL: <https://eastlansinginfo.org/content/safety-concerns-raised-bailey-center-senior-housing>

Links

[1] <https://eastlansinginfo.org/content/safety-concerns-raised-bailey-center-senior-housing>

[2] <https://eastlansinginfo.org/content/east-lansing-community-invited-preview-reimagined-bailey-center>

[3] <https://baileypreschoolchildcare.com/>

[4] <https://www.cityofeastlansing.com/CivicAlerts.aspx?AID=834>

[5] <https://eastlansinginfo.org/content/triplett-goddeeris-and-woods-vote-close-bailey-building-set-be-locked-june>

[6] https://eastlansinginfo.org/sites/default/files/bailey_ground_lease.pdf

- [7] <https://www.capitalareahousing.org/>
- [8] <https://www.capitalareahousing.org/board-of-directors>
- [9] <https://www.michigan.gov/mshda>
- [10] <https://www.freep.com/story/opinion/contributors/2018/05/30/skilled-trades-shortage-michigan/637014002/>
- [11] https://eastlansinginfo.org/sites/default/files/temporary_certificate_of_occupancy_bailey_center.pdf
- [12] https://eastlansinginfo.org/sites/default/files/incident_listing_elfd_for_300_bailey_street.pdf
- [13] http://eastlansing.granicus.com/MetaViewer.php?view_id=2&clip_id=974&meta_id=61684
- [14] <https://eastlansinginfo.org/contact>
- [15] <https://eastlansinginfo.org/donate>
- [16] <https://eastlansinginfo.org/askeli>
- [17] <https://eastlansinginfo.org/citycouncil>
- [18] <https://eastlansinginfo.org/community>
- [19] <https://eastlansinginfo.org/devplan>
- [20] <https://eastlansinginfo.org/finance>
- [21] <https://eastlansinginfo.org/government>
- [22] <https://eastlansinginfo.org/tags/historic-structures>
- [23] <https://eastlansinginfo.org/senior>