

CITY OF SALISBURY  
WORK SESSION (VIA ZOOM MEETING)  
FEBRUARY 16, 2021

Public Officials Present

Council President John “Jack” R. Heath  
Councilwoman Angela M. Blake  
Councilwoman April Jackson (joined at 5:00 p.m.)

Council Vice President Muir Boda  
Councilwoman Michele Gregory

Public Officials Absent

Mayor Jacob R. Day

In Attendance

City Administrator / Acting Mayor Julia Glanz, Deputy City Administrator Andy Kitzrow, Department of Infrastructure & Development (DID) Director Amanda Pollack, Fire Chief John Tull, Deputy Chief James Gladwell, Housing & Community Development Department (HCDD) Director Ron Strickler, Building Official William Holland, City Attorney Mark Tilghman, City Clerk Kimberly Nichols, and members of the Public and press.

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On February 16, 2021 the Salisbury City Council convened in a Work Session at 4:30 p.m. via Zoom. The following is a synopsis of the topics discussed:

**Ordinance- accepting a grant to purchase pediatric educational equipment**

Fire Chief John Tull discussed the ordinance to approve a budget amendment accepting funds for Maryland Institute for Emergency Medical Services System (MIEMSS) in regards to the 2021 Pediatric Educational Equipment funding opportunity. This one time funding opportunity would enable the Fire Department to purchase \$1,200 in pediatric educational resuscitation equipment.

Council reached unanimous consensus to advance the budget amendment to legislative session.

**Discussion- Rooming House/Rental Life Safety Task Force presentation**

Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) Director Ron Strickler presented the attached PowerPoint presentation, which has been made part of the minutes.

Mr. Boda asked if Rooming Houses were like a hotel room with just one room, and if they were required to include bathrooms. Mr. Strickler said Rooming Houses shared bathrooms and kitchen space. There were other properties that had multiple apartments in them that were somewhat split up like Rooming Houses but since they had bathroom or kitchen space, they did not qualify. Mr. Boda asked City Attorney Mark Tilghman if a property owner wished to conduct an inspection but the tenant refused, could they only inspect the property with an administrative warrant. Mr. Tilghman said if tenants were occupying the space, then it was their private space, but it could be enforced if it was stipulated in the lease.

Ms. Jackson asked Mr. Strickler where the 23 Rooming Houses were, and he said there were multiple ones in the First and Second Street Neighborhoods and in the Church Street area. Most were near Fitzwater Street or by the Perdue plant. She asked what was considered an efficiency apartment. Mr. Strickler said if it had a bathroom it would be considered an apartment. She asked when the electrical panel was replaced at 119 First Street, and Mr. Strickler said he thought it was November 2020 and the inspection was completed on the installation. She reported receiving complaints about some of the properties in her district and asked if landlords were required to provide heat to the rooms. Mr. Strickler thought they had to keep it at least on 65 degrees.

Ms. Gregory asked if a method such as the Citizen Reporting Portal on the City website could be utilized for tenants to request inspections and file complaints. Mr. Strickler said when complaints were currently received from the online portal, HCDD proceeded with scheduling an inspection, and he encouraged using the system. Ms. Gregory asked how tenants could be reached to make the education aspect more widely known. Mr. Strickler said they would visit properties, knock on doors, distribute information, explain who they were and what they were attempting to do.


Mr. Boda said that one of the ways to educate tenants was to teach them how to put their rents in escrows in court. The funds being held would prove they were paying their rent and once the issues were fixed the court could return the funds to the landlord. There was also concern about the relationship issue (4-2), and some of the people living in Rooming Houses probably would be in a real home if it were not for that law. For Rooming Houses, he said the best approach would be the Fire Code, occupancy, how many people could safely live there, room for vehicles, egress, and off-street parking. He thought they could target overcrowding by reducing requiring strict occupancy limits on these Rooming Houses.

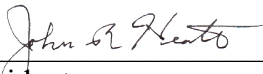
President Heath asked Mr. Tilghman about landlord retribution. Mr. Tilghman suggested they could add mechanisms to the licensing code to enable the City to suspend or terminate a license. Mr. Heath said that sprinklers were most effective, but the tenants would likely pay for them in the form of higher rent. Everything Council did would be passed on to the tenants, which complicated things. He asked Mr. Strickler to return to Work Session with the education program and let them know how Council could assist him. He suggested representation of all of the people involved at the Work Session in which the program was presented.

Deputy Chief James Gladwell informed Council the Rooming Houses were required to have one fire extinguisher per every 3,000 square feet of floor area, and one per floor, whether or not they had sprinklers, according to the Fire Code. Tenants would need training to use the extinguishers.

### **Adjournment**

With no further business to discuss, the Work Session adjourned at 5:19 p.m. and Council then convened in the scheduled Special Meeting.

  
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City Clerk

  
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Council President



City of Salisbury  
Rooming House Rental  
Life Safety Taskforce  
Report

# Historical Inspection Data

- ▶ Inspection process started under leadership of Director William Holland in 2004 after a lengthy discussion with City Council
  - ▶ *30 inspections per month for two years, total estimated inspections completed at 720 of approx. 6,500 rental properties*
- ▶ Rental inspection process continues in 2008 with random inspections, no exact data available
- ▶ 2010 to Current
  - ▶ *2,965 Random Inspections Attempted*
    - ▶ *1,575 Completed and Closed*
    - ▶ *1,390 Refused or no response given*
  - ▶ *2,295 New Unit Inspections Completed*
    - ▶ *Change of property ownership/management company requires inspection for license, regardless of prior inspections*

# Rental Registration/Inspection Process

- ▶ Property owner submits application for owner license and rental unit/s
- ▶ Paperwork processed by HCDD Staff
  - ▶ *Lead Certificate required for properties constructed before 1978*
- ▶ Inspection scheduled and completed by Code Enforcement Officer
  - ▶ *Standards of Livability met*
  - ▶ *No code violations*
- ▶ Rental and unit licenses granted after successful inspection
- ▶ No inspection required at renewal
- ▶ Currently just over 9,500 registered rental units

# Rooming House Rental Environment of Salisbury, MD

- ▶ Currently twenty-three (23) rooming houses in operation in Salisbury
- ▶ One Hundred Sixty-Nine (169) Total Rooms in the twenty-three (23) operational rooming Houses
- ▶ Management of rooming houses is divided amongst seven (7) owners/property management companies
  - ▶ 17 Properties – (1) owner
  - ▶ 2 Properties – (1) Owner
  - ▶ 1 Property – (1) Owner
  - ▶ 1 Property – (1) Owner
  - ▶ 1 Property – (1) Owner
  - ▶ 1 Property – (1) Owner

# *Historical Data on 119 First Street Rooming House*

- ▶ Property was converted to rooming house prior to Zoning Changes
- ▶ Inspection & Code Violation History (2010-Present)
  - ▶ Complaint Inspection 11/22/10 (Single Unit)
  - ▶ Complaint Inspection 09/26/11 (Single Unit)
  - ▶ Complaint Inspection 06/08/12 (Single Unit)
  - ▶ 12 Exterior Code Violations
- ▶ Initial investigation by code offices determined that egress and square footage requirements were met

# Inspection Process Barriers

- ▶ Current Code states that Housing and Community Development and Fire Safety Inspectors can perform “random mandatory inspections”
  - ▶ City legal team advises that we cannot force mandatory inspections if denied without administrative search warrants
- ▶ Random Inspections can be denied by:
  - ▶ Property Owner/Management Company
  - ▶ Tenant
- ▶ If denied, Code Enforcement is required to provide administrative search warrant
  - ▶ Warrants not easily attained without clear evidence of life safety violations of which are hard to produce without inspection



# Short Term Solution

- ▶ Education campaign targeting current rooming house tenants
  - ▶ Minimum Standards of Livability
  - ▶ Life Safety/Code Violations
  - ▶ Request tenants of rooming houses allow life safety inspections by team of Code and Fire Inspection Officers
    - ▶ Property owner/management company approval not needed if tenant grants authority to enter premises
  - ▶ If multiple rooms are inspected and dwellings are found in violation, administrative search warrants for additional rooms are more easily attained with clear and concise evidence of life safety issues in other non-inspection units within dwelling

# Long Term Solutions

- ▶ Explore legislation requiring rooming houses be sprinklered with in a 5 year period
  - ▶ *Consider cost sharing with property owner to complete*
- ▶ Explore additional legislation in regards to square footage required for living space
  - ▶ *Currently 70 Square Feet for single occupancy Room*
  - ▶ *Currently 120 Square Feet for double occupancy Room*
- ▶ Explore additional legislation based on non-related occupants residing at properties