

Universal Holdings Provides Update on Recent Housing Closures

Universal Holdings is providing additional information regarding the recent temporary closure of several residential properties near Marshall University and the steps being taken following issues identified by fire officials.

We began acquiring fraternity houses from alumni organizations approximately 25 years ago, and six properties were recently inspected. Four of these were being used as active student residences, while two were either vacant or undergoing renovations.

The properties are equipped with hard-wired fire alarm systems, exit signage and pull stations, the last time a house was inspected by fire marshal was August 2024. An independent fire protection contractor also completed the annual certification of the fire systems immediately following the recent inspection.

During the inspection process, we were informed it is now a requirement to have a sprinkler system for properties with third-floor occupants.

The fire marshal subsequently informed us that the affected properties would need to be posted until the immediate safety issues were addressed. Following that, our first action was to offer to relocate students living on third floors to other properties we own, affecting 11 students.

Those immediate fire and life-safety concerns have now been resolved, and the do-not-occupy notices have been removed from the properties except for 1428 5th avenue. This property was not rented this year because we were planning on applying for a demolition permit this fall. The first and second floors on the other five houses may now be occupied. We are continuing to address additional things identified through the inspection process, but these items are not considered immediate safety concerns.

We began working immediately with the affected students to identify alternative housing options and informed residents that they could cancel their leases if they preferred.

We recognize that this situation has been tough for students and families, and we accept responsibility for addressing the issues identified through the inspection process. Our focus remains on completing the remaining work as quickly as possible and supporting the students affected.

The State Fire Marshal's Office and the City of Huntington have been very helpful throughout this, and we appreciate their guidance.

We also want to address some misinformation suggesting that Marshall University sought these closures because of an interest in purchasing the properties.

That is not accurate.

Marshall has never expressed an interest to us in purchasing these properties. In fact, when the university learned students could be displaced, Marshall immediately offered assistance, worked to identify housing options and arranged for U-Haul storage containers to help with relocations. Marshall has also indicated that it is working with the Greek community and other partners to explore future housing solutions, and we welcome that conversation.

We intend to complete the remaining non-emergency items identified during the inspection process within the outlined period and will continue working with fire and city officials until those are finished.

Looking ahead, we are also exploring long-term plans for our 5th Avenue properties, including relocating fraternity housing to the south side of 5th Avenue and redeveloping properties on the north side.

Our priority remains to complete the remaining work, support the students affected and work with local officials and Marshall University to move forward responsibly.