

## SRHA board briefed on bedbugs



By Jimmy LaRoue

Published 9:46 pm Wednesday, August 28, 2019

The Suffolk Redevelopment and Housing Authority board of commissioners received a briefing Tuesday on bedbugs from a company hoping to win a contract to treat them at Chorey Park Apartments.

The discussion came before tensions rose between agency attorney Delphine Carnes and commissioner Jeffrey Robertson regarding her representation and on information he said she should have provided to the commissioners on companies bidding to treat the bedbug problem.

Dennis Gray of Accurid Pest Solutions told the board that heat alone cannot solve the issue of bedbugs, and that there needs to be chemical treatment as well. He also said it could take three or four treatments to get rid of a persistent bedbug problem.

“This is going to be a long-term project,” Gray said, “So anyone who thinks that this is a 30, 60 or 90 day thing, I’ve been doing this (for) 19 years. This is not going to be a short process. There were four other companies at the bid. Three of them I know personally. They didn’t want to touch this project. It was out of the scope of (what) they could handle.”

Commission Chairman Ben Fitzgerald said that seven companies inquired and just one — Accurid Pest Solutions — put a bid on it.

Amy Disel Allman, a managing attorney with Virginia Legal Aid Society, told commissioners during the public comment portion of the meeting that she was representing several residents at Chorey Park, and said they told her the bedbug issue has gone on for far too long. She said Virginia Legal Aid Society is willing to help be a part of solving the bedbug issue, but said the living conditions for the elderly and disabled residents living there is unacceptable.

“Since I’ve been involved, we’ve spoken to a lot of people. There are a lot of people who live there who are not willing to come forward, who have spoken to me and have provided information to me confidentially,” Allman said.

Commissioner Regina Hall said the bedbug issue has not improved.

Robertson expressed frustration with Carnes for not providing information he requested about potential bidders to do bedbug treatment at Chorey Park, as well as information on how she came to be the authority’s attorney.

Robertson said the commission could have solved the bedbug issue had Carnes provided the requested information, but said she advised the agency not to give it to him.

“That’s not true,” Carnes said, as Robertson continued.

He blamed Carnes for the commission not being able to vote Tuesday on a company to treat the bedbugs at Chorey Park.

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Carnes said she responded to both Snipes and Fitzgerald.

“I spoke with Tracey Snipes and Chairman Fitzgerald when you sent your email,” Carnes said, “and I responded to both Tracey and the chair that absolutely you were entitled to that information, but it should not be sent by Tracey Snipes to just you by email, but under FOIA, it should be provided to everybody as part of the board packet. That was my answer verbatim.”

Robertson said that under FOIA, the commission could have had the information, and that, he said, is what he asked to be sent to everyone on the commission.

“You didn’t ask me anything,” Carnes said in response.

“Then you advised them not to,” Robertson said. “That’s bad advice.”

“That is not true,” Carnes said. “I’m not going to sit there and let you say something that’s not true.”

Fitzgerald said Snipes told him it would be a FOIA violation to send the information via email.

Carnes said she advised Snipes to include the requested information in the board packet to the entire commission, and said that FOIA does not allow for board business to be conducted by email.

“Nothing in the presentation that we were given today would be covered under FOIA, that we were given by this company that came in,” Robertson said. “Nothing at all would be covered under FOIA under what he told us, and we could have had that information, read through it and been educated on it before this meeting. Instead we sit here, and we’re not, and we’ve got to wait another month then. And so these people have got to suffer. You can go home to your home, no bedbugs, but they’re going to go home to bedbugs in their home.”

He also asked how she was chosen as the agency attorney, and why the board never got to vote on a different attorney, saying that the board doesn’t know what the agency is being billed for it.

Robertson said the agency did not follow procurement policy, which Carnes disputed. Robertson read out loud, Virginia Code section 36-55.29, which outlines duties of executive directors of housing authorities.

“You are one of those people we can hire,” Robertson said. “We should have voted on that.”

“No, actually you are inaccurate,” Carnes said.

He accused her of substituting her judgement for that of the state legislature and the council who appointed us.

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“She disagrees with the law,” Robertson said.

“I do not. This is just asinine,” Carnes said in response. “The board adopted a procurement...”

“I’m asinine?” Robertson said, interjecting.

“You’re not listening at all,” Carnes said in response.

“I didn’t call you asinine,” Robertson said.

Carnes said Snipes followed the board’s adopted procurement policy to hire her as an attorney for the authority after Carnes left Crenshaw, Ware and Martin, the authority’s previous attorney.

“The board does not vote on it,” Carnes said.

Crenshaw, Ware and Martin had been representing the authority through June 28, according to minutes from SRHA meetings, and Carnes was listed as absent at that meeting. Carnes and her firm, Delphine Carnes Law Group, were listed as the authority’s attorney in the July 23 minutes.

Commissioner Clementine Cone said that no matter who has the authority to choose a new attorney, the board should have been notified that it was being represented by a new attorney.