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'Dilapidated' units burden Annapolis public housing residents awaiting redevelopment



Eastport Terrace resident Kia Perkins points to her crumbling ceiling. (Paul W. Gillespie/Staff)



By **KATHARINE WILSON**

PUBLISHED: May 24, 2026 at 5:00 AM EDT

Inside Annapolis' oldest public housing complexes, residents say they are trapped in a cycle of mold, ceiling leaks and pest infestations, sometimes moving from one troubled apartment to another only to encounter the same conditions again.

Public housing residents say they haven't seen significant improvements since the city started inspections, but data shows violations per unit are down. The Housing Authority of the City of Annapolis, or HACA, said redevelopment projects in the works over the next decade are the long-term solution. Final financing is pending, and the largest construction project is still years away.

Broken lights in a laundry facility, boarded-up windows, decrepit sidewalks, severe leaks, evidence of pests, nonfunctioning appliances, and mold growing in units were visible when the Capital Gazette visited Eastport Terrace and Harbour House. The Capital Gazette spoke with a

half dozen residents, toured multiple units, reviewed dozens of pages of public records from the city of Annapolis, and evaluated court documents in three lawsuits.

HACA officials blame aging buildings, funding shortfalls and resident-rooted issues for the maintenance challenges at their oldest public housing properties, Eastport Terrace and Harbour House.

The long-standing problems, while improving, [persist](#) despite several legal efforts to remedy them. A lawsuit alleging housing discrimination brought in 2019 and settled two years later mandated the city to inspect public housing with the same rigor as private rentals after years of failing to do so, which partially led to a significant drop in violations per unit by last year.

The 2019 case also led to [payments from the city and housing authority](#). Annapolis plans to settle two federal lawsuits, one class action and one brought by representatives for a public housing resident who died, through a [\\$15 million settlement](#) framework announced Friday.

As of last month, 120 public housing units out of 554 still did not have valid city rental licenses because violations identified during inspections remained unresolved, according to the city. That left only 78% of units licensed. In a January 2023 court-mandated city report, 70% of units had licenses issued after 2022 inspections.

While violations per unit and unlicensed rentals have decreased since the mandated city inspections, residents in the oldest HACA properties said there are major problems in their units. The communities are still years away from planned redevelopments.

Heaven White, a plaintiff in the first lawsuit, said she has lived in three HACA units, and all three, including her current Eastport Terrace unit, have had mold.



Eastport Terrace resident Heaven White talks about mold in her bathroom and the poor condition of the three Annapolis public housing units she has lived in over the years. (Paul W. Gillespie/Staff)

White has furnished her living room with two ottomans and a lounge chair. She's hesitant to purchase a full furniture set, she said, because her last couch was destroyed when mold infiltrated her previous unit. She said she cleans her bathroom ceiling every two weeks, trying to get a handle on the mold growing in her current unit.

"It's frustration, it's disappointment, it's hurt, it's immediate panic," White said in April. "It's a stress on your mental health."

Since the 1980s, Annapolis inspected and gave licenses for private rental units, but not public housing units. Annapolis first inspected public housing units under then-Mayor Mike Pantelides in 2016. Back then, Pantelides, a Republican, said inspectors found significant issues in units, including nonfunctioning smoke detectors, mold and sewage backups.

"It is unacceptable for anybody in this city, in a state capital, or for anybody to live in conditions like that," Pantelides said of the previous findings. "It just infuriates me that it happened."

Public housing inspections did not continue into the start of former Democratic Mayor Gavin Buckley's first term in 2017. Buckley told the Capital Gazette that city inspections were paused to reevaluate the capacity of Annapolis inspectors while the city government worked on more permanent solutions.

While the city worked on those solutions, the first lawsuit hit in 2019, followed shortly after by a new city resolution to inspect public housing units. However, the class-action suit set to be settled soon claims that before the first lawsuit's settlement the city continued to treat residents of public housing differently from rental residents elsewhere in the city, including through the inspection process.

What city inspections turned up

When the city was mandated to inspect public housing units in 2021 as part of the lawsuit settlement, roughly two violations were found per unit inspected. By 2025, the number had halved to 0.85 violations per unit, according to city data, coinciding with routine evaluation and renovations of some properties.

Since 2021, the city inspects each HACA unit annually. If inspectors find a violation, the city notifies HACA and performs a reinspection, typically within 30 days of the first inspection. Properties must pass a city inspection to have rental licenses.

“The challenging issue is that in order to address all of these issues, it requires funding,” said Melissa Maddox-Evans, executive director of HACA.

120 Annapolis public housing units did not have city licenses on April 29

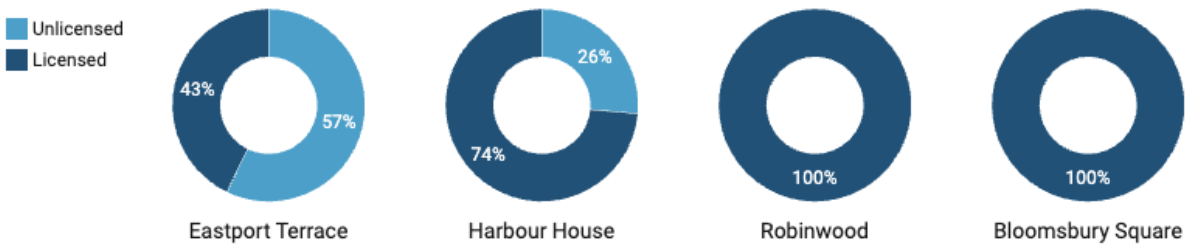


Chart: Katharine Wilson • Source: City of Annapolis • [Get the data](#) • Created with [Datawrapper](#)

Violations per Annapolis public housing unit since 2021 settlement

This chart only counts the Morris H. Blum Senior Apartments from 2021 through 2023, when they were part of public housing. The apartments were then redeveloped into a private-public complex.

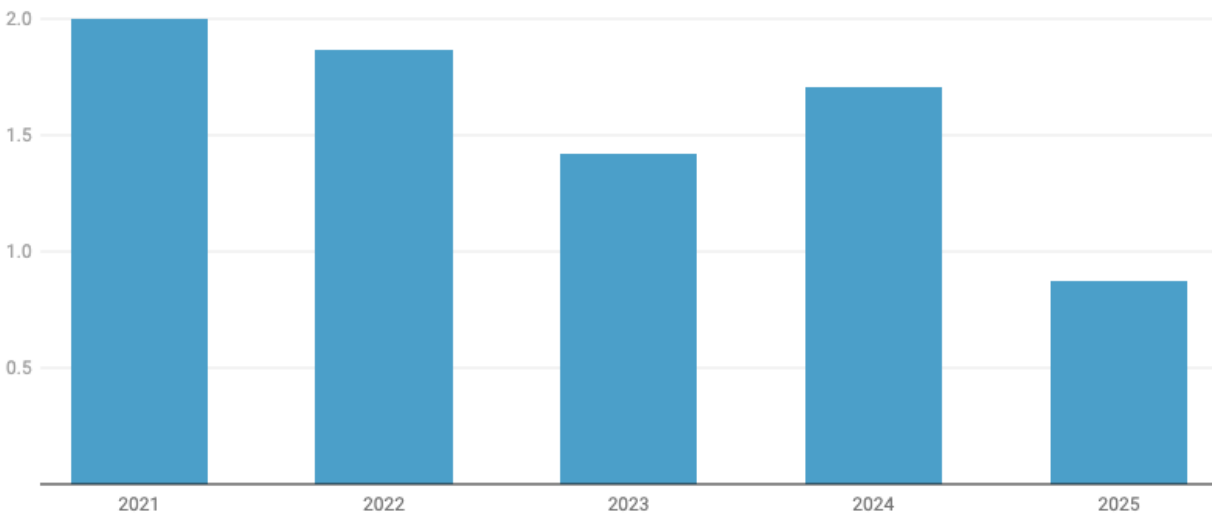


Chart: Katharine Wilson • Source: 2021-2023 Court filings, 2024-2025 City of Annapolis • [Get the data](#) • Created with [Datawrapper](#)

Denneishja Cromwell moved into Harbour House in December. Cromwell said she has had maintenance requests ignored and had to ask her ex-boyfriend to fix her leaking sink. She said her uncle, also in a HACA property, has a ceiling caving in.

Cromwell's building has mice, she said, and the wheelchair lift outside the laundry facility is often unplugged and unusable.

"There were orange notices all over," Cromwell said of the bulletins the city posted on doors of units that failed inspection and do not have a rental license. "It's a mess over here."

Kia Perkins, a single mother of three, is in her third HACA unit in 19 years, split between Eastport Terrace and Harbour House.

A caving bedroom ceiling in Harbour House forced Perkins to leave her first unit, she said. Cockroaches from a neighbor also infested Perkins' first unit and crawled into her refrigerator, she said.

Perkins said a kitchen ceiling pipe leaked "like a shower" in her second unit, in Eastport Terrace. Her new unit, also in Eastport Terrace, has a hole in the kitchen ceiling that leaks water and has mold growing around it.

"It's a headache, it's tiring, and me, personally, I'm a little agitated," Perkins said last month. "I'm getting tired of it."

Perkins' unit was among the 48 still unlicensed on April 29 in Eastport Terrace, which has 84 units. She said her maintenance requests have gone ignored, despite in-person, online and phone inquiries.

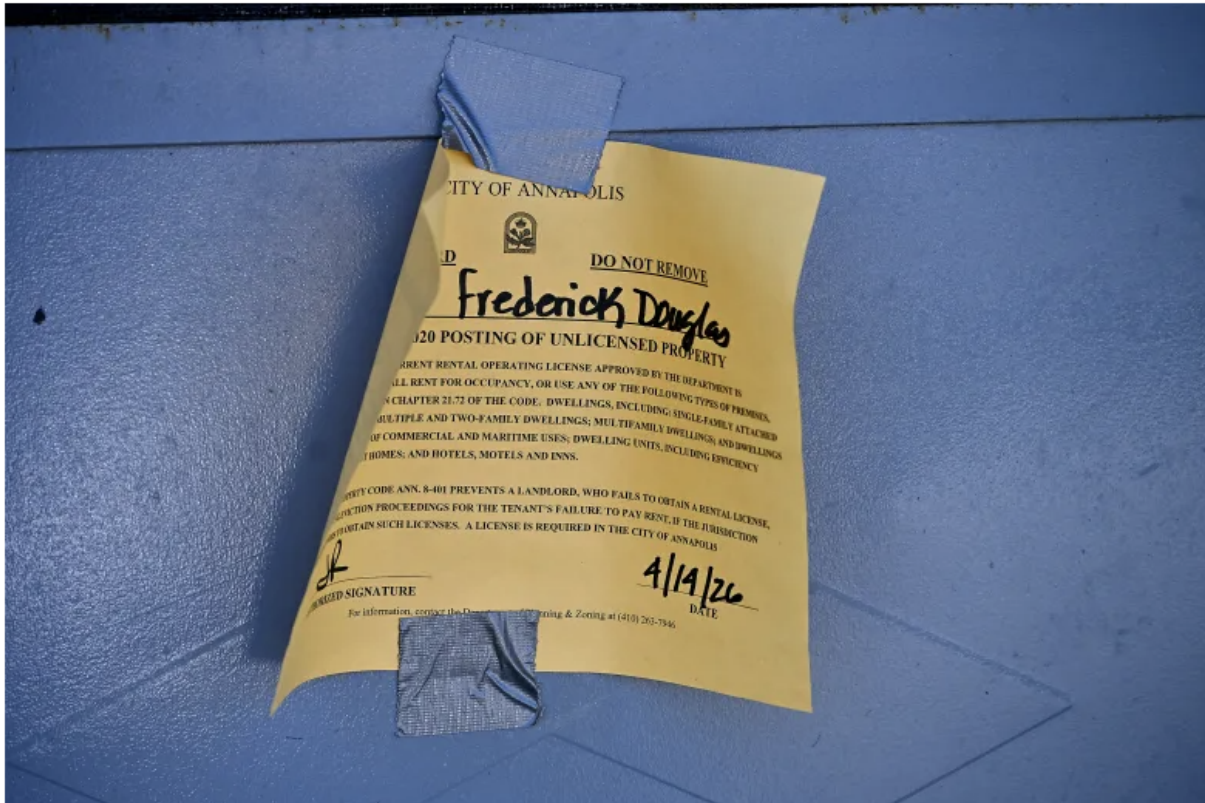
HACA's underlying issues

HACA said the standard maintenance protocol is that emergency issues are addressed within one day. Urgent and emergency issues, like broken heat and leaks are resolved in two days. Routine work like painting or drywall fixes are completed within 30 days.

Delays, the housing authority said, stem from "operational constraints" including reduced revenue when units are unlicensed and the advanced age of the buildings. HACA said in a statement that its older properties are operating beyond their "intended lifespan."

The housing authority operates in a \$1.4 million budget shortfall, Maddox-Evans said. HACA's expenses, including maintenance, cost more than the revenue they receive from rent and the federal government.

The agency is often unable to collect rent from residents living in unlicensed units, and the housing authority can't legally evict residents for nonpayment. It also can't fill vacant units that don't have a license



Many units in Eastport Terrace displayed placards saying the units were unlicensed, even though they may be occupied. (Paul W. Gillespie/Staff)

There is currently \$320,600 in outstanding rent associated with units that were unlicensed, according to HACA. Annapolis can levy a \$200 fine per day for operating an unlicensed unit, but HACA said the city does not enforce these penalties due to the housing authority's financial state.

City inspections are more frequent and thorough than federally required inspections. Maddox-Evans said that discrepancy creates two sets of codes, making it hard to comply with local and federal regulations.

In 2024, the housing authority was given a "troubled" rating from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. Maddox-Evans, the executive director of HACA, said the rating is partially due to HACA's low occupancy, with 88% of units occupied, and because of the housing authority's budget shortfall.

Craig Coates, chairman of the HACA board of commissioners, said residents sometimes hinder city inspections, knowing HACA is unable to evict tenants if units are unlicensed. He also contended that tenants cause some violations by neglecting their units.

Any violations of the property maintenance code, from damaged window screens to life-threatening issues, can put a city license in jeopardy.

Coates said the units, especially in Harbour House and Eastport Terrace, are “dilapidated.”

Many of the issues, he said, will be resolved once HACA finishes a major redevelopment. Projects are planned or completed for every public housing property in the city.



Eastport Terrace resident Heaven White said mold frequently covers her bathroom walls and ceiling. (Paul W. Gillespie/Staff)

HACA’s pending solution

The housing authority is moving away from its old model, managing public housing units, to a private-public partnership for all HACA units that involve a redevelopment or complete rebuild. The change, Maddox-Evans said, will eventually make the authority less reliant on federal

funding, which would be used only for housing vouchers — rental subsidies to help people afford private housing.

HACA completed a redevelopment this year of a former public housing property, the Morris H. Blum Senior Apartments. This turned the complex into the latest private-public partnership property in which HACA handles housing vouchers and an outside partner manages operations.

A redevelopment of the Robinwood community, built in 1970, is scheduled to begin construction in 2028 with an estimated cost of \$100 million.

Eastport Terrace, built in 1953, and Harbour House, erected in 1964, are set to be redeveloped through HUD's Choice Neighborhood Initiative grant program. The plan calls for the public housing facilities to be demolished and replaced with a neighborhood including units for all current residents and additional units for mixed-income residents.

The housing authority estimates that construction will begin in 2028 or 2029, costing about \$350 million and taking about eight years to complete.

“There is no other viable path for the sustainability and longevity of public housing in Annapolis because the housing that we currently have is past its useful life,” Maddox-Evans said.



Eastport Terrace, pictured above, is one of the public housing properties slated for redevelopment. (Paul W. Gillespie/Staff)

HUD will likely finance part of the Eastport Terrace and Harbour House redevelopment, but the housing authority said the project will be funded through a mix of federal, state, local, private equity and other investments.

Stefanie DeLuca, a professor of sociology and social policy at the Johns Hopkins University, said a perk of HACA's plan is that public housing residents wouldn't lose their homes. However, DeLuca said with these types of developments, there can easily be short-term and long-term problems.

"Affordable housing is good for kids. Residential stability is good for kids, and being in places that are mixed income is good for kids," DeLuca said. "If these developments meet all these conditions, then this is great. This is ... something to celebrate, but, you know, the devil may be in the details."

HACA's relationship with the city has improved within the last year, Maddox-Evans said. HACA meets weekly with city inspection staff, which Maddox-Evans said helps make the inspectors more available to conduct reinspections soon after issues are solved so units can be licensed and rent can be enforced.

Former Ward 6 Alderman Dajuan Gay, a Democrat, represented the ward with Eastport Terrace and Harbour House from 2019 through 2025. Gay, who is the son of Eastport Terrace resident White, said the lawsuits have raised awareness, but living conditions have not improved enough in some HACA properties.

“I think that the quality of life is slightly better, but I do not think that it’s a drastic improvement,” Gay said about the effect of city inspections. “It’s helpful, but they need new homes. They need new units.”

Have a news tip? Contact Katharine Wilson at kwilson@baltsun.com.