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News

Willington Oaks renters upset over renovation delays

By **Alison Cross** · September 15, 2020

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University of Connecticut students expecting to move into newly remodeled apartments found unlivable units, some lacking walls, floors and toilets. Willington Oaks management said that renters must wait another month to move in.

"I feel like we were totally deceived into thinking we would have a place to live in by the time school starts," Hazel Montano, a seventh-semester applied and resource economics major said.

In June, Montano and her three friends toured a "gorgeously" remodeled Willington Oaks apartment. Relieved to secure the last unit available in the complex, they put down a \$500 deposit that same day.

Two weeks before classes started, the four roommates learned that their unit would not be ready until Sept. 15, three weeks after their planned move-in date of Aug. 22. At this point, Montano said that they were disappointed, but decided to keep the apartment and sign the lease anyway.

At the start of September, Montano decided to check on her apartment for the first time.

"I get there, and it was basically a skeleton, no walls, they tore everything apart. The second bathroom wasn't even built yet," Montano said. "[It's] just upsetting that they would do this since they cater to students and should know that school starts end of August. I kept checking the unit every other day. It didn't seem like much was done in the unit at all."

Sept. 11, she visited the apartment and once again saw little progress. Montano and her roommates planned to move-in in four days; The unit was nowhere near ready. After failing to contact Willington Oak's management, Montano decided to speak with construction workers at the property.

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"One of the guys was honest and just said there's no way it'll be done by the 15th. So I had to find out about this by checking the unit regularly and talking to construction. The leasing office had not sent us anything," Montano said.

That same day, Montano's roommates called the Hartford office of Up Reality, the company in charge of Willington Oaks. The management said that their unit would not be ready by Sept. 15; They would now need to wait until October.

"It's not only frustrating to us, but also to our parents. They just don't care about us at all, and we feel that we have to be aggressive towards them to get an answer

from them because otherwise, they'd just ignore us," Montano said.

Another student renter, who chose to remain anonymous because she has not yet signed her lease and fears retribution, told a similar story of delays and miscommunications. After a series of dead phone calls, she said that her roommates had to visit the Hartford office in person to receive an answer about the status of their property.

The renters affected said Up Reality offered them a free hotel stay, or a rent credit while they wait for construction to finish. However, Up Reality did not specify the type of hotel or location. Many renters are now scrambling to find temporary housing.

Montano said that she is currently staying with friends. Another roommate is crashing on a couch, while the other two remained at home. Montano's roommate, Payton Howard, a fifth-semester majoring in geographic information systems, commutes three hours two days a week to take in-person classes on campus.

"I appreciate them trying to compensate with the hotel offer and everything, but at this rate, it's just obnoxious and unprofessional. The remodeled units are truly beautiful, especially for the rate they charge for them, but it's kinda a 'you get what you pay for' in terms of the lack of communication with management," Howard said.

Daysha Jones, the regional property manager of Up Reality, said that the company is doing its best to overcome the obstacles from the complex-wide renovation.

"No one likes excuses, and I won't give you any," Jones said in an email to the Daily Campus. "I am sorry for the outcome this has come to, and we know that for some of our residents that go to UConn, this was an additional inconvenience; As someone that excels for perfection, this was pretty upsetting to me."

Jones said that the COVID-19 pandemic delayed manufacturing and deliveries for building materials. In addition to setbacks caused by the pandemic, Tropical Storm Isaias resulted in more delays as the city required inspectors to assess emergency storm damage. Laborers were also in short supply, Jones said.

"We know this year may have not been the best outcome for our residents that attend UConn—and nowhere near what we anticipated for our apartments in general—but we look to resolve this ASAP and are looking forward to being the top apartment complex going forward," Jones said.

Jones did not say when construction on the final units will finish. Nor did she comment on the lack of prior notice tenants received concerning the status of their apartments. According to renters, the current tentative move-in date is October.

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Alison Cross

1 COMMENT

Julia October 12, 2020 At 1:05 pm

DO NOT I REPEAT DO NOT MOVE HERE. They do not respect their tenants AT ALL. I moved in at the beginning of may this year. They sent me a video of a perfectly refurbished apartment that would be like the one I would be moving into. The apartment wasn't newly renovated like the one I was shown. New floors, yes but that is it. Horrible paint job around the apartment, tile in kitchen not finished, freezer door handle broken off, cracked bathroom sink, heat constantly on and then some. I needed to move somewhere asap and signed the lease before I moved in. Yes that is on me but I had no where else to go. None of these fixes have been made yet by the way. It is October. In August the upstairs neighbor had a massive leak in their bathroom. Took three weeks before they fixed it. Guess who still has damage in their ceiling? You guessed it! Me. On the bright side I got a new storm door that I didn't need! I have 2 decent sized dogs and they gave me a storm door that has the mesh on the bottom of the door...So smart. But I digress. There is also only 1 washer and 1 dryer in my building (there is one other set that has been down there for months not hooked up yet) that is 2 dollars to wash and 2 to dry. This building has 16 units.... What the last straw for me was going outside to find my vehicle missing. There was no parking so I parked my truck off to the side in a dirt/mossy spot between two large trees out of the way. I don't exactly have a small vehicle either. I work third shift, I was tired and I wanted to get some sleep and there are vehicles parked on the grass all the time anyways. So because they implemented a new rule over the weekend (without telling ANY of the residents I might add) I woke up to find my vehicle missing and some signs posted at the entrance of the facility saying no trespassing. Well I live here and my vehicle is registered here so then maybe it was stolen? Was well. The property manager had it towed 30 miles away to a place in East Hartford. I found this out from the police by the way. I have yet to hear from the property manager. He wont return my calls or texts. So to get my vehicle back, you have to pay for mileage too. This rule that was implemented is new by the way. Keep in mind there is also no stickers for vehicles or assigned parking. There was no email. There was no text. There was no communication with the tenants here at all. They don't care about you. They only care about money.

I implore you, do not move here.

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