

Crystal Towers: Timeline of Key Events (2015-2026)

prepared by
Forsyth Futures



This timeline, prepared for the Crystal Towers residents by Forsyth Futures, shows key events from 2015 to 2026 so residents do not have to retell their story. During this time, the building has faced deferred maintenance, a proposed sale, and ongoing uncertainty. In response, residents formed a tenant union, organized to engage decision-makers, and advocated to preserve and improve their homes.

Initial Background

Note: The Housing Authority of Winston-Salem (HAWS) rebranded as ASPIRE in 2025.

2015-2016: Building described as functional with a six-month wait for a unit. HUD rejects HAWS's \$30M Choice Neighborhoods grant due to incomplete documentation, including failure to document required resident meetings.

2017: HAWS conducts its first needs assessment of Crystal Towers. Residents form Crystal Towers United, a tenants' union.

Sale Attempt & Resident Resistance

2018: HAWS announces Crystal Towers is for sale, citing ~\$7M in needed repairs. A council member warns the sale "will be viewed as gentrification".

2019: A private buyer makes an offer. Mayor Joines says he will not sign without an adequate relocation plan. Housing Justice Now begins meeting with residents after being contacted about bedbugs and evictions.

2020: New HAWS executive director named. COVID reduces maintenance to one supervisor covering Crystal Towers and Sunrise Towers combined (396 units).

2021: Residents ask city to use \$7M of \$51M in ARPA funds for repairs. Both elevators fail simultaneously; repair estimate rises to \$14-15M.

Victory & Renewed Neglect

2022: After 3.5 years of resident activism, HAWS announces it will keep the building and work with the City renovate. Residents hold a victory rally.

2023:

- **February** — Cracked walls, standing water, bedbugs, roaches, both elevators down. The City says the renovation plan is expected no later than 2025.
- **September** — Residents march to HAWS board meeting demanding a renovation update. Three-phase plan outlined; elevator contract awarded to KONE. The same day, council approves \$5.14M for Truist Stadium upgrades. Residents protest outside City Hall, saying the lives of Crystal Towers residents don't matter as much as minor league baseball.

2024: Fire on the fourth floor in January. No sprinkler system; no fire extinguishers available to residents.

Demands, Renovation, & Uncertainty

2024: Residents call for public housing representation on the HAWS board. State law allows the mayor to appoint up to 3 public housing residents; he has appointed 0. The one board member meeting the legal minimum is a voucher recipient residents say has been unresponsive. Joines says he is open to adding a representative.

- 2025:**
- **February** — Residents present a petition signed by 100+ residents: 70% report sewage backup, mold-caked ceilings. One longtime resident: "We're trying to survive... you promised to help us, and we need you." Residents call for the executive director's resignation and reference the death of a resident after severe smoke inhalation in a second-floor fire. Mayor Joines says HAWS reported no outstanding plumbing work orders, contradicting residents. Third needs assessment since 2017 nearly complete.
 - **March-April** — HAWS completes first full-market building assessment. Residents of Crystal Towers and Healy Towers demand the executive director's firing at a protest outside the King Building.
 - **May-July** — *HAWS officially rebrands as ASPIRE*; executive director steps down June 30. New executive director named; grew up in public housing.
 - **September** — Amphitheater lease approved by City 6-2 while the motion to delay for Crystal Towers community engagement fails 6-2. ASPIRE announces \$31M renovation estimate. The resident meeting about the amphitheater's impact had been scheduled for September 5, two days *after* the vote.
 - **November** — Full assessment raises renovation figure to \$40+ million. ASPIRE solicits nonprofit partners; requires minimum 125 affordable units (vs. 201 currently) and one-for-one right to return.

- 2026:**
- **February** — More than half of residents sign a demand letter to ASPIRE: binding right to return, no rent increases, moving assistance, same unit count, tenant association in any developer contract. Residents report ASPIRE made efforts to dissolve the tenant council. ASPIRE received one letter of interest; residents say they learned from community members before ASPIRE told them.
 - **March** — ASPIRE states Crystal Towers is not currently for sale. ANCHOR (Affordable North Carolina Housing Organization, est. 1968) identified as the sole respondent to the November solicitation. ASPIRE states it is forming an advisory committee of residents, board members, and city staff to review proposals; residents asked to apply by March 13.
 - In March 2026, residents described retaliation cases under ASPIRE management, ongoing fire and evacuation safety concerns for disabled residents on upper floors, and unit conditions including mold, pest infestations, and appliances not being replaced. Residents also reported that elevator outages remain a recurring issue despite the 2023 replacement.
 - Residents have consistently raised displacement as their primary concern.

Escalating Repair Estimates			
Year	Estimated Cost	Context	Source
2018-2019	~\$7 million	HAWS, when listed for sale	WS Journal, Aug 2018
2021	~\$14-15 million	After elevator failure	WS Journal, Feb 2025 (retrospective)
2022	~\$10 million	HAWS estimate after sale canceled	WS Chronicle, Jan 2022
Sept. 2025	~\$31 million	ASPIRE assessment	WUNC, Sept 2025
Nov. 2025	\$40+ million	Full assessment by ASPIRE/CJMW	ASPIRE Press Release, Nov 2025