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Owners ordered to demolish condemned Fort McMurray condos



The Penhorwood condominium complex, now surrounded by a fence, is covered with graffiti and shattered glass.

Photograph by: Tophier Seguin , Edmonton Journal

EDMONTON - The owners of Fort McMurray's Penhorwood condominiums have been ordered by the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo to demolish the unsafe buildings with the threat of hefty fines or jail.

An order issued to the owners states the seven buildings pose a danger to people and property and the condo corporation or owners must demolish the buildings by Sept. 30.

After that, the municipality will bring the buildings down itself, the order states.

The document lists fines of up to \$100,000 and \$1,000 per day and/or imprisonment not exceeding six months for the owners.

“They are in a panic,” said Christine Burton, president of the Penhorwood Condo Association, on Friday.

“We really had hoped that they would do this a different way and not add insult to injury to these poor people whose lives are falling apart.”

It’s the latest setback for Penhorwood owners after more than 300 residents were evacuated from the condos in the middle of the night in 2011 after an engineer’s report questioned the safety of the buildings.

They have not been allowed back, but continue to pay mortgages, condo fees, the costs of their current homes and legal fees for a \$60-million lawsuit they have launched against more than 28 defendants, including the municipality, developer and construction companies.

It’s the second demolition order issued in two years. Last year, the municipality told condo owners to tear the buildings down by Sept. 20, 2013.

The owners responded then that they couldn’t afford to demolish the buildings and negotiated to include the cost of demolition by the municipality as part of a lawsuit settlement arrangement, Burton said.

“But that kind of fell apart so nothing happened for almost a year, and they do this,” she said of the second demolition order.

She said it appears the municipality wants to serve each owner, to attach a caveat on each person’s title to recoup the cost of demolition if the land is sold.

“If that’s what they’re doing, it means selling the land is going to be much more difficult, much more complicated and much more expensive.”

Each owner would be on the hook for about \$100,000, she said.

Burton said she wished the municipality would continue discussions with the owners’ lawyers on a possible settlement or engage in mediation “to talk about how we can do this without panicking our poor owners.”

The Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo issued a short statement Friday saying the issue is public safety.

“Based on the current condition of the buildings, we determined that they need to come down as soon as possible,” said Safety Codes Manager Damon McGillivray in the written statement. “The order was issued to ensure public safety.”

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