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To: ["Direct to Mayor and Council - DL"](#)
Date: 8/22/2025 4:03:52 PM
Subject: Council Package: Emergent Issue Order to Vacate at 1654 E Pender St. (DBL) (Aug 22, 2025)

Hello Mayor & Council,

Staff have identified that an Order to Vacate posted at 1654 East Pender Street may become emergent in the media or the community. In response, staff have prepared a brief package with key messages, key facts and relevant Q&As that may be helpful to you in media interviews or conversations with stakeholders and constituents.

Issue in brief

- On August 12, Vancouver Fire and Rescue Services (VFRS), the Chief Building Official (CBO) and the City's electrical, plumbing and gas inspectors conducted a joint inspection into a property at 1654 East Pender Street following a complaint that the owner converted the single-family dwelling into an 18-room boarding house.
- This unpermitted conversion creates serious life safety risks for tenants and first responders. Overcrowding, overloaded electrical wiring, altered plumbing and gas systems, and a lack of proper fire separations or exits can all increase the likelihood of fire and other life-threatening hazards.
- Due to the significant life-safety risk, the CBO posted an Order to Vacate on August 25. The building will be required to be vacated by September 8, 2025.

Communications approach in brief

- The City will respond to media questions reactively.
- Saul Schwebs, Chief Building Official, will serve as City spokesperson if needed.

Key messages

- Due to significant building safety violations resulting from unauthorized renovations, the Chief Building Official posted an order to vacate the building at 1654 East Pender Street.
- This follows a joint inspection by VFRS, CBO and electrical, plumbing and gas inspectors, which found that the landlord had converted the single-family home into an 18-room dwelling.
- The inspection revealed serious electrical and plumbing violations and unauthorized structural changes to the building, including the addition of bedrooms without required egress windows and the alteration of staircases. Inspectors also found unsafe wiring and improperly installed plumbing systems that significantly increase the risk of fire, flooding, and electrocution.
- The Province's Residential Tenancy Branch has been notified, and City staff have provided tenants with a list of community resources should they need any support.

Key facts

- The Vancouver Building By-law (VBBL) and the Vancouver Fire By-law sets out the minimum health and safety standards for all buildings in the city.
- Property owners are responsible for ensuring that buildings comply with the VBBL and the Vancouver Fire By-law, including requirements for structural integrity, fire and life safety, plumbing, electrical systems, and safe means of egress.
- Life-safety measures under the VBBL include:
 - Proper egress windows and stairways to allow safe escape in an emergency.
 - Fire protection measures such as alarms, sprinklers, fire separations, and fire-rated construction.
 - Safe installation and maintenance of plumbing, gas, and electrical systems.
 - Structural soundness of alterations, additions, and renovations.
- Any renovation, alteration or new construction requires permits and inspections to confirm compliance

- with the VBBL.
- Unauthorized work that compromises building safety, such as removing staircases, creating bedrooms without egress windows, or altering electrical and plumbing systems without permits, violates the VBBL and can lead to enforcement action, fines, and orders to vacate unsafe premises.
- The property owner does not have any previous violations. City staff are investigating if the property owner owns other buildings and whether those may also have unsafe conditions.
- The City is currently focused on executing the Order to Vacate and will determine appropriate next steps for the owner in the weeks ahead. We are aware that VFRS issued a Municipal Ticket Information and that the Province's Residential Tenancy Branch may also review this matter.

Questions & Answers

Q: What consequences will the owner face?

A: The City is currently focused on executing the Unsafe to Occupy Order and will conduct further inspections of the property and consider potential enforcement actions in the upcoming weeks.

Q: Will the owner be required to convert the building or will it be demolished?

A: As the work was not completed to life-safety standards, the owner will be required to take action to make the building safe. The City is taking the time necessary to assess the building and determine appropriate next steps.

Q: Will the CBO be referring this to prosecution?

A: The Chief Building Official (CBO) is reviewing the file closely. If warranted, the case may be referred to prosecution to ensure accountability for the violations.

Q: How was the landlord able to make so many changes without any inspections?

A: It is the landlord's responsibility to obtain permits and comply with building safety requirements. In this case, the City responded right away after a complaint was received, and inspectors quickly identified the violations and began enforcement steps.

Q: What can tenants do if they suspect their landlord is making unsafe changes?

A: Tenants should report any concerns about unsafe changes directly to the City's Property Use Inspection team. Our inspectors will follow up to ensure the property meets safety standards. They can also connect with the Residential Tenancy Branch to get advice and support about their tenancy.

Q: How are tenants being supported?

A: Everyone deserves to live in a safe home. We know this situation leaves tenants in a difficult position. The Residential Tenancy Branch has been notified and City staff are providing tenants with information on community resources to help them navigate next steps.

Q: How much was the landlord charging?

A: Tenants reported that the landlord was charging about \$800 per month per bedroom.

Q: Is the landlord responsible for the tenant's temporary housing?

A: For questions regarding the landlord's responsibilities under the Residential Tenancy Act, please contact the Residential Tenancy Branch.

Related links

- [Residential Tenancy Branch](#)
- [Report a concern to the City's Property Use Inspection team](#)

Given this is an evolving issue, we will provide a follow up note if context or messaging requires updates. If you have any questions about the foregoing, please reach out to Angela MacKenzie at angela.mackenzie@vancouver.ca. You can also direct any media inquiries to media@vancouver.ca.

Thank you,
Sandra

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The City of Vancouver acknowledges the unceded homelands of the x̄m̄k̄ȳm̄ (Musqueam), S̄wxw̄u7mesh (Squamish), and S̄el̄il̄witulh (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations.