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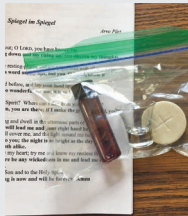
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Developer sued for damaging affordable apartment
now plans to demolish it

▲ The owner of 2003 Aldrich Ave. isn't sharing its cost estimate for repairing the building. Randolph Street Realty Capital plans to demolish it in September and build a market-rate apartment on the site. Photo by Isaiah Rustad

By Zac Farber

Lowry Hill East neighbors are mobilizing to try to save what was once a 25-unit affordable apartment from demolition, but despite the current owner having played a role in damaging the building, city officials say there's little to be done to stop it.

The city ordered the apartment at 2003 Aldrich Ave. to shut down in 2018, with families forced to move out, after cracks large enough to see through floors appeared in the facade and inspectors fretted that further shifts of the building could cause a gas leak and, potentially, an explosion. The building, which includes two retail spaces, has been vacant ever since.

SEE **CRACKED APARTMENT** / PAGE A14

Not so fast

Charter Commission's
slow-rolling of public safety
amendment follows pattern

By Andrew Hazzard

When the Minneapolis Charter Commission voted to use its full review period to consider an amendment to replace the traditional police department with a new public safety model — a move that will keep the issue off the 2020 ballot — Council President Lisa Bender wasn't surprised.

In many ways, the move echoes events that Bender saw play out two years ago. On June 23, 2018, Thurman Blevins, a 31-year-old Black man, was shot and killed by Minneapolis police during a foot pursuit. In the aftermath, Council Member Cam Gordon (Ward 2) proposed a charter amendment that would have given the City Council more power over police department operations. The council approved the amendment on a 7-5 vote and sent it along to the Charter Commission for review. Like this year, the body opted to take its full review, and the amendment was kept off the 2018 ballot.

The killing of George Floyd by a Minneapolis police officer has drawn unprecedented levels of protest, activism and attention to city government, including to the Charter Commission, a little-known, judge-appointed board that didn't even broadcast its meetings until the coronavirus pandemic began.

Now that board, and the role it plays in Minneapolis, is under more scrutiny than ever.

The proposed amendment would have eliminated the requirement for a minimum number of police officers and replaced the Minneapolis Police Department (MPD) with a public health-based department of public safety using a combination of traditional peace officers, social workers and interveners to address crime and safety issues.

The City Council's intention was to create alternatives to armed police, to assert more direct power over the force and to increase the

SEE **CHARTER COMMISSION** / PAGE A6

Ilhan Omar wins big; Fateh ousts Hayden

Two seasoned local DFL lawmakers suffer primary defeats

By Nate Gotlieb

U.S. Rep. Ilhan Omar, the first Somali-American elected to Congress, swept to victory over a well-funded primary challenger on Aug. 11 as two other progressive candidates of color — both second-generation African immigrants — staged primary upsets against established local DFL state legislators.

In Southwest Minneapolis, Omar bested the Uptown resident and media lawyer Antone Melton-Meaux on his home turf, winning every precinct in the Uptown area while also taking the neighborhoods along Interstate 35W.

Melton-Meaux won most of the higher-income, whiter precincts south and west of the Chain of Lakes, showing strength in a majority of the precincts won by former Vice President Joe Biden in the March presidential primary.

Omar won every Southwest precinct that went to Sen. Bernie Sanders, as well as

precincts in Bryn Mawr, Kingfield, Tangle-town, Linden Hills, Armatage and Kenny that went to Biden and Sen. Elizabeth Warren in March.

Out of the 40,389 ballots cast in 39 Southwest precincts, roughly 58.1% went to Omar, 40% went to Melton-Meaux and 1.9% went to other candidates in the five-way race.

Omar, a progressive hero whose left-wing views, political missteps and racial identity have attracted a variety of critics, won 58.2% of all votes cast in the 5th District — a 19-point margin of victory and a significant expansion of her base from the 2018 primary, when she won 48.2% of the district.

"We earned a mandate for change," Omar said in an election-night statement. "Despite the attacks, our support has only grown."

SEE **PRIMARY** / PAGE A12



Omar Fateh, 30, was overcome with emotion on Aug. 11 after defeating incumbent state Sen. Jeff Hayden in the Senate District 62 primary. Photo by Isaiah Rustad

FROM **CRACKED APARTMENT** / PAGE A1

Council President Lisa Bender (Ward 10), who represents the area, said that while she is saddened and angered at the loss of naturally occurring affordable housing, the city has no legal avenue to make the owner repair the building. She said the wrecking permit, which is currently being processed, cannot be denied on subjective grounds.

“It’s so unbelievably frustrating,” she said. The building’s current owner, Randolph Street Realty Capital, purchased the building in March after settling a lawsuit filed by the previous owner, Michael Feddersen.

At the time of the cracking, Randolph Street was doing excavation work on a project immediately to the east of 2003 Aldrich — razing the Theatre Garage and Steeple People sites on Lyndale Avenue to make way for the 111-unit Pure Lowry apartment complex that’s opening to tenants this September.

Feddersen’s lawsuit alleged that Randolph Street’s subcontractors negligently installed soil nails, soldier piles and something called “rammed aggregate piers,” leading to an over-excavation of the soil and a “cave-in deep below the surface” of 2003 Aldrich. Soil conditions are poor in the area, which was once the site of a 40-foot deep swimming hole, “Lake Blaisdell,” that was filled in the late 19th century as the city’s population grew.

The result of the cave-in, the suit claimed, was that the site “settle[d] abruptly” in July and August of 2018, causing pipes to leak, doors to stop working, aluminum windows to bow and twist and walls both inside and outside the building to crack.

On Oct. 12, 2018, the city gave residents three days to vacate. While all buildings move and have some cracks, Ken Staloch, a city building official, told the Southwest Journal that he’d never seen a building move to the degree that residents needed to leave.

A handful of the tenants had to go to emergency homeless shelters, according to consultant Monica Nilsson. She said the property management company moved tenants who could afford it into units in other buildings. “They were more expensive and smaller, but people were desperate,” she said.

The 2003 Aldrich apartment, built in 1923, had needed some interior and exterior repairs, patching and brick tuck-pointing before 2018, but a report that Feddersen commissioned from the forensic engineering firm Wiss, Janney, Elstner Associates found that were it not for the damage from the project, 2003 Aldrich “would have continued operating as normal into the foreseeable future.”

Randolph Street hired its own forensic engineering firm, Encompass, which concluded that its client’s activities were “the primary cause of the recent movement of the 2003 Aldrich structure.” (Encompass’ report found that rain sliding off 2003 Aldrich’s roof and into the soil over the past decade was also a “significant contributing factor.”)

Randolph Street and Feddersen reached a confidential settlement in February, and Feddersen sold 2003 Aldrich to Randolph Street for \$525,000 in March — significantly less than the \$3 million Feddersen paid for the property in May 2017. Feddersen and Randolph Street principal Jonathan Saliterman have declined to comment for this story, and it’s unclear whether the sale was a term of the settlement. Feddersen reached a confidential settlement with his insurance company, Midwest Family Mutual Insurance, the same month he settled with Randolph Street.

During litigation, both Feddersen and Randolph Street commissioned independent estimates of the cost of repairing the building, but those estimates are not included in public court documents. Feddersen’s lawsuit places the cost of damage at over \$50,000.



The owner of the soon-to-be-completed Pure Lowry apartment complex (left) at Franklin & Lyndale settled a lawsuit for damaging the affordable apartment building at 2003 Aldrich Ave. (right) during 2018 excavation work on Pure Lowry’s site. The city shut down 2003 Aldrich after cracks large enough to see through floors appeared in the facade. Photo by Isaiah Rustad

Before it was vacated, rents at 2003 Aldrich were \$799-\$1,099, according to apartment listings.

Randolph Street has preliminary plans to replace the nearly century-old, four-story brick building with a five-story, 47-unit market-rate apartment that includes ground-floor retail and 14 parking spaces.

At a Lowry Hill East Neighborhood Association (LHENA) committee meeting on Aug. 12, board president Alicia Gibson vowed that neighbors would fight the proposal tooth and nail.

“We are in an affordable housing crisis, and there were people made homeless by this,” she said. “Developers need to know that if they pull a stunt like this in our neighborhood, there’s going to be hell to pay.”

LHENA wants time to determine whether it’s possible to repair 2003 Aldrich and is looking to wage a public pressure campaign against demolition. Gibson said city leaders need to use their power to stop the destruction of naturally occurring affordable housing.

“Our city’s elected officials should be held accountable for saying bye-bye to affordable housing,” she said.

Saliterman has told LHENA staff that his firm plans to demolish 2003 Aldrich by mid-September.

Andrew Hazzard contributed reporting to this story.

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