

Protest erupts against demolition of collapsed building in Iowa while five residents remain unaccounted for

George Gallanis
30 May 2023

As Sunday night extended into the early hours of Monday in downtown Davenport, Iowa, people gathered around a partially collapsed century-old apartment building, protesting the city's demolition plan. With individuals believed to be still trapped inside and five residents unaccounted for at the time of this writing, protesters shouted, "Find them first!" and "Move the bricks!"

Known as "The Davenport," the apartment building at 324 Main Street, built in 1911, collapsed on Sunday evening at around 5 p.m. The city government had plans to initiate demolition by Tuesday morning, citing a safety risk and danger of imminent collapse.

News about the planned demolition circulated rapidly through social media, sparking protests. Initially, the city's Democratic mayor, Mike Matson, a former Army Ranger, asserted that no additional individuals were thought to be trapped within the wreckage. However, on Monday afternoon, a rescue team found Lisa Brooks, a 45-year-old mother of three and nurse at Davenport's local hospital, alive in the rubble. As of now, the authorities have reported no deaths.

The public outcry grew following the delayed discovery of Brooks, the ninth survivor, and protests spilled over into Tuesday. Residents feared that the scheduled demolition could seal the fate of potential survivors trapped within the wreckage.

Friends and family of the residents began to gather outside the building on Monday, desperate for news about loved ones who lived there. On Tuesday morning, city officials retracted their initial proposal, stating, "The actual timing for the physical obliteration of the property remains under consideration."

Five individuals, including Ryan Hitchcock and

Branden Colvin, remain unaccounted for and are believed to be inside the building.

Protests have intensified, with news outlets reporting that around 250 people had gathered near the building by 8:30 a.m. on Tuesday.

Davenport is one of the Quad Cities on the Iowa-Illinois border. Jade McGuire, a Moline, Illinois, resident, told the *Quad City Times* that she had joined fellow protesters for nine hours on Monday near the partially collapsed apartment building. By 6 a.m. Tuesday, she had returned to the heartrending scene.

The 29-year-old was drawn to the site by her personal experience with the grim realities of living in dilapidated rental accommodations. "I went two years without heat. It was so bad my partner got frostbite on her toes," she said. "In the rental before that, we had eight gas leaks."

"This also has a lot to do with poor people being forced to live in bad conditions," she added. "I came here because I wanted to be a voice of reason." She said renters often lack a say in the maintenance of their living spaces and their concerns are frequently dismissed.

Criticizing the police on the scene, she said, "[The police officers] were shaking their heads, smirking and lying to family members. If you're going to be someone in higher authority, you have to be willing to answer questions. I know the officers can't do that, but they were smirking and scoffing at people, who were crying."

An employee at aluminum maker Arconic in nearby Riverdale, Iowa, told the WSWWS: "I have seen it and have been following a few updates. I don't know anyone personally involved, but some of my coworkers

do. It's a very bad deal.”

He expressed shock at the city's moves to demolish the building on Tuesday, saying, “Yeah, that's crazy. I'm sure there was some money pushing behind that idea.”

Multiple residents told WQAD News 8 that the building had deteriorated before its partial collapse.

The building had consistent water issues and cracks in the walls. “There is always something wrong with the water,” resident Toriana Hill said. “It's always something wrong with the building, period.”

Yvette Williams, another resident, said, “When you first come into my apartment, on the right-hand side, before you go into the kitchen, there was a crack.”

Scott County records show that Davenport Hotel LLC, associated with Andrew Wold, owns the apartment building. Although city officials have been in contact with Wold, it remains unclear whether a criminal investigation will follow the disaster.

In response to the collapse, Republican Governor Kim Reynolds issued a disaster proclamation for Scott County. The proclamation activates the Iowa Individual Assistance Grant Program and the Disaster Case Management Program for affected residents, which provide grants of up to \$5,000 for households with incomes up to 200 percent of the federal poverty level.

Beyond the physical collapse, the disaster has had a devastating personal impact. The collapse has destroyed entire homes filled with treasured possessions, leaving residents homeless.

The chilling images of the partially collapsed building, with personal belongings dangling precariously, evoke other structural failures such as the Surfside, Florida, condo collapse in 2021.

The WSWS wrote at the time:

The residents of the beachfront building, located just north of Miami Beach, include retirees, middle-class families and vacation renters. Depending on how many people were in bed and how many survivors can be pulled from the rubble, the Champlain Towers disaster will rank as one of the deadliest residential building collapses in American history. The incident once again exposes the decrepit state of infrastructure in the United States and raises

questions about how such a building could fall down in the wealthiest country in the world.

The Davenport disaster exposes once more the reality facing workers in the United States. As with the pandemic, in which profit was placed over lives, leading to over a million deaths in the United States and millions more worldwide, even the most basic of rights, including the right to live in a safe home, is under threat.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact