

Davenport, Iowa building inspector resigns as evidence emerges of lax oversight of apartment which collapsed

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In the days since the deadly collapse of the building at 324 Main Street in Davenport, Iowa, on Sunday, evidence has emerged of criminally lax oversight by the city government over the dangerously deteriorated property, which has likely claimed the lives of as many as three residents.

Two of the residents, Branden Colvin, Sr. and Ryan Hitchcock, were believed to be in the building at the time of collapse. A third, Daniel Prien, whose apartment was in the collapsed area of the building, is unaccounted for, but officials have not established whether he was at home at the time.

Despite numerous complaints from residents and warnings from local contractors about serious structural problems, city records reveal the building passed several inspections in the months prior to the deadly collapse. Even though severe problems had been identified in 2020, city officials did nothing to protect or warn residents of the building, whose owner, Andrew Wold, is a major area landlord with three other downtown buildings and dozens of houses and other buildings around the city.

According to a report from Iowa Public Radio, residents repeatedly complained to city code enforcement about problems with the building. Many complained about a lack of heating in the winter and broken elevators, windows and ceiling tiles. One of the most concerning reports was an incident in which residents reported water leaking throughout the building, down ceilings and walls all the way to the ground.

Jacklyn Gillespie, a relative of one resident, told the *Quad City Times* that the unit's bathroom on the third floor "was flooded and stayed that way for several days."

Jennifer Smith, co-owner of 4th Street Nutrition, a business located in the building, said "in the hallway, there has been water leaking into our business. Sometimes

the hot water won't work." Smith also noted 14 units in the building had been condemned in January.

Even with all these issues, the city acted only in response to overflowing dumpsters and garbage that was allowed to accumulate in stairwells and block exits. For this, the building was cited 19 times for being a nuisance, and Wold paid \$4,500 in fines.

Beginning in February, local utility company Mid-American Energy warned the city the southwest corner wall of the building had dangerously deteriorated, with crews refusing to work in the area until the building had been shored up with scaffolding to prevent collapse.

Around this time, Ryan Shaffer, a co-owner of a local masonry company who was working on a nearby building, was approached by Wold for a quote to work on the apartment building. Shaffer told the *Quad City Times* that Wold rejected his bid as too high, saying Wold "wanted to cut the cost by cutting out the shoring and supporting of the building," which would have run \$50,000.

Shaffer said he told Wold, "If we don't do it this way exactly, I'm not putting my guys in there. Somebody is going to die."

On Friday, two days before the collapse, Shaffer went to the building and warned workers there, "Get away. You're going to die." On Saturday, Wold approached Shaffer again and asked for I-beams and materials to support the building, but Shaffer responded, "There's no saving it at this point." On Sunday, less than two hours before the building collapsed, Shaffer again returned to the building and told workers they needed to leave.

Despite these dire warnings from Shaffer, the building passed five inspections by the city before the collapse, on February 22, March 1, April 12, April 21 and May 1, and continued to receive permits for structural repairs. Trishna

Pradhan, the chief building inspector for Davenport, wrote in the March 1 inspection the “site is secure” and on May 1 noted, “repair work has been completed per Engineer’s Report.” Pradhan resigned on Wednesday.

David Valliere, an engineer with Select Structural Engineering, who had been contracted by Wold, warned that two beams needed to be bolstered, but claimed the building was safe. In a report released by the city, Valliere wrote, “This engineer determined that this is not an imminent threat to the building or its residents,” but added that “structural repairs will be necessary.”

An inspection report by Select Structural from May 23 included the following: “On the west face of the building, there are several large patches of clay brick façade, which are separating from the substrate. These large patches appear ready to fall imminently, which may create a safety hazard to cars or passersby.”

The report also noted the building’s facade was “bulging outward” and said the contractor should secure it to “keep the entire face of the building from falling away when the bottom area(s) come loose.”

A May 25 inspection that showed as “failed” on the city’s website immediately after the collapse had originally been marked as “passed” by the city, according to archived versions of the inspection found online. City officials claimed this was due to a “glitch,” and that the inspection should have been marked as “incomplete” as the work was still ongoing. While it is clear the work was still ongoing, the city’s response does not explain why the inspection originally showed that it “passed.”

Following the collapse, the city moved with tremendous speed to demolish the building, claiming it represents an imminent hazard. The rush to tear down the building attracted immediate protests from local residents concerned there could still be people alive in the rubble. Indeed, even though the city had wanted to begin demolition on Tuesday, a ninth survivor was found later that day. Residents held signs reading “Who is in the rubble?” and “Find them first!!”

One resident, Quanishia White-Berry was rescued from the collapsed building on Monday but had to have her leg amputated to free her from the rubble. Her wife, Lexus Berry, said she and Quanishia were sitting in their apartment when they noticed a crack over their bathroom doorway. They then grabbed their cats to leave when the building collapsed and they were separated, with Lexus saying, “There was nothing left but where I was standing.”

The family of Branden Colvin are demanding further

searches be carried out before any demolition occurs. Colvin’s cousin Preston McDowell told CNN he did not understand why the city was moving toward demolition with residents still missing. McDowell said, “They’re not giving us any answers. I just don’t get it. You know there are people still unaccounted for, but you want to tear down the building. What sense does that make? They’re letting us know they don’t care.”

As a major area landlord, Wold has significant financial and political connections in the Quad Cities. Wold owns the building through his company, Andrew Wold Investments. That company’s registered agent is attorney Robert H. Gallagher, the father of nearby Bettendorf’s mayor, Robert S. Gallagher. Both Gallaghers are attorneys at the firm Gallagher, Millage & Gallagher, PLC.

On Tuesday, Wold was cited by the city for failing to maintain the building “in a safe, sanitary and structurally sound condition.” The fine for this violation is a mere \$300, with an additional \$95 in court fees.

As the WSWs wrote following the collapse of Champlain Towers South in Surfside, Florida which killed 98 people in 2021:

As with the COVID-19 pandemic, which has resulted in the deaths of more than 600,000 Americans, the disaster in Surfside places in stark relief the reality that under capitalism the interests of society are completely subordinated to the interests of the financial elite, no matter the cost in human suffering and loss of life. A solution to the problems that confront humanity will not come through the profit system or any of the parties of the financial oligarchy. It will come through the revolutionary transformation of society under the democratic control of the working class on the basis of a socialist program.



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