

Residents of Davenport demand justice after missing bodies found in collapsed apartment building

Andy Thompson
12 June 2023

Last week city officials in Davenport, Iowa announced that the bodies of three missing men had been found buried underneath the rubble of the collapsed apartment building at 324 Main Street. Since the building collapsed on May 28, 42-year-old Branden Colvin, 51-year-old Ryan Hitchcock and 60-year-old Daniel Prien had been missing. It took nine days, until June 5, to sort through the wreckage and find the three men.

The victims leave behind many family members and friends who have been devastated by their losses. On the same day that his body was recovered, Branden Colvin's son graduated high school. At the graduation ceremony an empty seat was saved in the audience for the father, in honor of his memory.

Since the collapse, Davenport residents have been protesting against the city government both for its response to the disaster, and for allowing residents to continue living in the building when it was known to be structurally unsafe. In the immediate aftermath of the collapse, the city was prepared to move forward with demolishing what remained of the structure, before all the bodies of the victims had been recovered.

Neighbors and survivors have banded together to support one another in powerful acts of solidarity. It was public demonstrations at the site of the disaster that pressured local officials to pause the demolition plans and allow recovery operations to continue until all the missing were found. The demolition efforts are now moving forward after the last victims have been located.

Residents are demanding justice, and for those responsible for the collapse to be tried on criminal charges. The city council has been working overtime on behalf of the building's owner to cover up their mutual responsibility. There have been many calls from Davenport residents for the aldermen to step down.

The Mayor of Davenport, Mike Matson, gave his State of the City address today, in which he focused his remarks on promoting new infrastructure projects. Speaking of the collapse, the mayor could only offer residents gallons of crocodile tears. In the hour-long speech Matson said nothing about an investigation into the collapse or charges against the building's owner, or if resources will be provided to the building's former residents, many of whom have been made homeless.

It has now also become known that both the city and the building's owner, Andrew Wold, disregarded repeated safety warnings that the building was structurally unsound. Davenport's chief building inspector has already resigned. As recently as May 1, Trishna Pradhan, the inspector, completed an evaluation and signed off on the building as "secure."

Wold, it has been revealed, had likely been aware that there were serious problems with the building's integrity for years, even before he owned it. In 2020, Alliance Contracting LLC, a construction company owned by Wold, was hired by the building's previous owner to make repairs to the building. In June 2021 Wold bought the building. Since then, safety concerns by different inspectors and professionals were repeatedly raised, but no action was taken by Wold or city officials to close the building or to warn residents of the danger.

In light of this information, Davenport's residents have been outraged by the negligence and are demanding Wold and complicit city officials be brought to justice. At a city council meeting on Wednesday residents came demanding answers for the collapse and for those responsible to be held accountable.

They have been greeted with total indifference by the city's elected officials, who are clearly making attempts to cover up both Wold's responsibility and their own. So

far, Wold has only been fined \$300 for his violations of safety measures. When confronted by angry residents, city council members have blamed a “glitch” in the city’s computer that had incorrectly listed the building as “passed” the inspection, when it had in fact failed.

Wold is a major landlord and investor in the area, with several different companies and buildings under his ownership. He is also highly politically connected. Wold’s attorney, who was the registered agent on the collapsed building, is Robert H Gallagher, the father of Robert S. Gallagher, who is the mayor of neighboring Bettendorf.

At the city hall meetings, residents have openly called for the sitting council members to be removed. This was met by open hostility from the aldermen. One resident asked his alderperson, Maria Dickman, to resign. She responded coldly, saying only, “OK.” Other residents expressed frustration that she could be seen snickering at residents’ comments throughout the meeting. “We got ya’ll in. We can get ya’ll out,” said Mike Collier, the cousin of Branden Colvin, one of the victims.

Outside the city hall residents can be seen regularly demanding murder charges against Wold and the others responsible. “Blood is on your hands,” read one sign held by a protester. One of the survivors of the building collapse, Lisa Brooks, has been among those leading the protests.

Iowa’s Governor Kim Reynolds appeared at the site of the collapse on June 5. Garbed in a yellow vest and hard hat, the purpose of her visit was to feign concern and to pose for photos. Her only response to the situation has been to request that the White House provide reimbursement funds for the cost of rescue teams and demolishing what remains of the structure.

So far three lawsuits have been filed against Andrew Wold. One of them is by two survivors of the collapse, Quanishia White-Cotton Berry and Lexus Berry. Quanishia, known lovingly by friends and family as “Peach,” had been trapped underneath the rubble for six hours before being found. In order to save her life, rescuers had to amputate her leg to free her from the wreckage.

Despite the tragedy, Peach remains in good spirits, telling reporters, “I’m looking forward to healing and getting good treatment, good care. I’m already seeing myself walking again. I don’t feel stopped by any means.”

The suit filed by the couple names both the city and Wold as responsible for the collapse. The 80-page

document cites several past inspections that stated the building was not compliant with building codes and that these complaints were known. “The family wants the owners of the building, the engineers, the contractors and other responsible parties held responsible for this tragic, and 100 percent preventable event,” said an attorney for the Berrys.

On Friday another building near the site of the collapsed apartments was evacuated. City engineers have been carrying out assessments of other buildings to find other potential dangers. Known as the Executive Square Building, five apartments in the building were ordered evacuated because of “areas of structural concern.”

City officials reported that due to the demolition work in bringing down the remains of the collapsed structure, the Executive Square Building requires additional structural reinforcement. “Out of an abundance of caution” the building would be entirely evacuated, the city said in a statement.

The building collapse has revealed the utter corruption of the state and local governments under capitalism. The Quad Cities area is home to several billion-dollar corporations including John Deere, Tyson, and Arconic.

Despite the billions in profit they produce for these companies, the workers of Davenport cannot even be sure that their homes will not collapse in on them. There are ample funds available to provide housing to all those affected by the collapse and to carry out proper inspection and repair of all workers’ homes.

Workers have every right to demand both justice against Wold, and that billions of dollars be appropriated to secure and improve the safety of their neighborhoods.



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact