

# Landlord endangers tenants in condemned 292-unit apartment complex in Kalamazoo, Michigan

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On May 7, approximately 300 tenants at the 292-unit Wildwood Off Main apartment complex in Kalamazoo, Michigan returned home to find orange notices reading “CONDEMNED” posted on every door.

“The deck and stair assemblies that provide ingress and egress to the individual units are deemed dangerous and unsafe,” the condemnation notices read. “All occupancy is prohibited until all corrections are completed and approved.”

A building official told reporters he had never seen anything to this point of decay and that not a single rear deck or egress in the complex was safe. Moisture damage in walls and ceilings and evidence of mouse infestations was also noted, among other things.

One tenant, Quaneal Coleman, told reporters that he passed out after falling from his balcony. “The railing started cracking, I guess, and I fell with the whole railing. When I came back to, I called 911 and the EMTs came and got me.”

Joshua Bierlein, a preschool teacher who has lived at Wildwood Off Main for two years, moved to a first-floor unit about six months ago after the upper deck outside his previous apartment began “warping inward.”

The inspections that triggered the condemnation were prompted by tenant complaints to Kalamazoo Township on April 28, according to records obtained by Fox17. According to News WWMT, several tenants had complained to management for months before contacting the township. The Kalamazoo Area Building Authority contacted the property owner on May 5 before resorting to condemnation.

The dangerous structural rot visible to the naked eye of tenants and building officials was not somehow invisible to the landlord. It did not appear overnight or as the result of an accident or incompetence. It is an expected product of a housing system driven by profit maximization amid a deepening crisis of capitalism.

## Landlord defies condemnation for 20 days

Wildwood was most recently sold to Lake Forest Kalamazoo, LLC for \$52 million in 2021. The company is owned by OpenPath Investments, a vertically integrated private real estate investment firm for “high-net-worth investors.”

CFO Anna Bissell posted a message in response to being named one of Northern Colorado’s 2025 40 under 40 by BizWest, stating that OpenPath has over \$100 billion in assets under management with an

average internal rate of return of 25.4 percent. OpenPath’s website claims their multi-family unit real estate portfolio includes more than 14,000 units in 39 states.

To maintain this rate of return on investment, landlords like OpenPath are motivated to avoid expenses that do not increase revenue. As founder and managing partner of OpenPath, Peter Slaugh, explained to WWMT, “I’m actually happy to share that, you know, we’ve spent, we’ve invested close to \$6 million in the property itself and about a million one [\$1.1 million] of that’s been woodwork, and paint, and just repair for the overall structure.”

OpenPath was aware of structural problems at Wildwood, yet most investment went into cosmetic repairs to boost rents rather than addressing the known structural problems. New Earth Residential, OpenPath’s “in-house management firm,” responded to the condemnation notice for the first 20 days with lies and defiance, including retaining legal counsel to fight the condemnation itself.

An email sent to tenants on May 8 stated, “The conditions identified by the Township were not known by Wildwood management until the red-tags were placed on doors.” Management told tenants it was fine to stay in the apartments and that since there were no evictions, there would be no refund of May rent and or waiver of June’s.

Meanwhile, two weeks after the condemnations, apartment units were advertised for rent and residents commented on social media that they saw management giving tours. On Facebook, a post encouraged tenants to “refer a friend and be rewarded.” Management also said that the pool will be opened, even though the stairs to get to it are condemned.

For tenants able to find and afford another home to move to, management circulated a Settlement and Release Agreement releasing residents from an early termination fee in exchange for waiving the right to sue the company in the future and accept a non-disparagement clause with a \$5,000 penalty for violating.

## Landlord shifts into damage control

On the morning of May 27, Wildwood’s website listed 92 units available for rent, representing an exodus of tenants who did not accept management’s narrative. In the afternoon, management pivoted abruptly, taking down listings and putting caution tape on stairs to block access to upper-level units.

An email sent at 7:24 p.m. demanded, “residents occupying the upper-level units must immediately discontinue use of the stairs and decks and vacate their units,” and management was, “working diligently to secure temporary housing for all families located on the second floor for this evening.”

One upper-floor tenant, who identified herself as Brandi, told WWMT reporters, “It was kind of an instant panic moment.” Lower-level tenants were not offered “temporary housing” despite being advised to, “not stand under or in the vicinity of stairs and decks that serve upper-tier units,” and to use caution when entering or exiting their units.

The messages to residents did not mention refunding May rent or waiving June rent and management thought the repairs could take up to a year.

On May 30, a WWMT reporter asked Slauch about a list of demands from tenants including prorated May rent refunds, a guarantee of no June charges, reimbursement for moving expenses, complete repairs meeting KABA standards, and reasonable accommodations until all buildings are repaired. He responded that June rent would not be charged but was evasive on the other points. The offer for hotel stays for upper-level tenants has been reported to cover only five days at \$200 a night.

These limited steps being taken are the result of the tenants’ defiant organizing and speaking out publicly which pose significant financial impact, such as the decline in expected rent collections from the exodus of residents and reduced rents from the reputational damage caused by the crisis.

### **Residents take initial steps to organize**

Shortly after May 7, as management and local officials offered conflicting information, residents took initial steps to organize their own support infrastructure and counter misinformation from management.

Resident Amber Johnson connected more than 150 neighbors through TikTok and a shared WhatsApp group, creating what she described to WOOD TV as “a bank of resources that’s 150 plus their network instead of just me by myself on Google.”

Through the group, tenants consulted a housing attorney online and began exploring the possibility of a class action lawsuit. Tenants also spread awareness that tenants do not owe rent for condemned apartments and began advancing demands.

At the May 26 meeting of the Kalamazoo Township Board of Trustees, Johnson and several other residents appealed for help and expressed their frustration at the lack of support they have received from the government up that point.

However, Democratic Party Township Supervisor David Combs responded by saying nothing could have been done by the local government to protect residents from the potentially catastrophic deterioration of the housing complex.

He claimed, “We are limited as to our legal standing as a Township as to what we can do, what we can and can’t enforce. We have very little, next to no authority when it comes to this matter and, at the same time, the Township is here to serve every resident.” Combs also postured as supportive of tenants by saying the township refused to enforce evictions demanded by Wildwood property management.

### **Government fails to provide a safety net after allowing rot to develop**

Thus far, no financial assistance has been offered by local governments to relocate residents to safe homes, even though the complex is in Kalamazoo County, where the majority Democrat County Board of Commissioners declared housing a public health crisis last December.

In April, the county government opened “The Landing Place,” a 77-room emergency housing shelter reserved for families. As of May 11, the shelter was fully occupied with a wait list of an additional 295 families.

The fact is that these measures are entirely inadequate to address the housing crisis in Kalamazoo County, which has now been exacerbated by the condemned Wildwood complex. The representatives of the Democratic and Republican Parties preside over a system that upholds and defends private ownership and the profit motive responsible for the dangerous conditions at Wildwood and abuse of tenants.

The lying, stalling and isolation of the tenants until they were forced from their homes without warning poses the necessity for further organizing efforts that maintain political independence from the capitalist parties and orient tenants directly to other sections of the working class entering struggle.

The dangerous and insecure housing faced by the residents of Wildwood Off Main is not an isolated incident, in the US or internationally. These are the predictable consequences of a system in which housing is a source of profits rather than a human right.

This is not a policy failure that can be corrected by reforms, but a direct product of a system that subordinates human needs to the wealth accumulation of a financial oligarchy.

The residents of Wildwood are encouraged to contact the *World Socialist Web Site* to share their experiences and discuss the formation of a rank-and-file committee to issue and struggle for demands such as oversight of repairs and no rent increases after the work.

Organized through the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC), these independent bodies can link working class struggles across borders and industries and coordinate actions to confront parasitic landlords like OpenPath.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](https://wsws.org/contact)**