Brooklyn building collapse kills eight next to site that defied city stop-work order

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Eight people have died and at least 18 others were injured after a building collapsed in the Flatbush neighborhood of Brooklyn on Wednesday. A massive search-and-rescue operation involving hundreds of emergency responders, K-9 units, drones and heavy machinery extended into Thursday.

The three-story apartment building sheared off from a row of connected units and plummeted into an excavation pit on the adjacent lot, where workers were digging at the time. Residents and construction workers were instantly buried in a mountain of rubble.

Anthony Griggs, who has lived in the neighborhood for 21 years, told the WSWS what he saw on Wednesday: “I get out of the shop, I hear two loud bangs. I’m thinking it’s the jackhammer because they’ve been doing construction over here since August, right? By the time I got to the corner, the building just collapsed. I’m over here jumping over bricks, trying to like figure out how to save my life. All you see is just a cloud full of smoke.”

Griggs was one of dozens of neighborhood residents looking on at rescue operations Wednesday evening, with anger at the owners of the many poorly maintained and overpriced buildings in the area threatening to boil over.

Police have released the names of all eight people killed: Nicole Daniela Salvada Rodriguez, 9; Kevin Santiago Reyes Gonzalez, 10; Gabriel Siguencia, 22; Barry Mamadou, 23; José Luis Caguana Cosquillo, 26; Edgar Sapon, 26; Juan Daniel Salvada Guzman, 31; and Ndiaye Mamadou, 31.

Five of the dead, including both children, lived in the building. The Colombian consulate said the two children and one adult killed were Colombian citizens. New York Mayor Zohran Mamdani said the dead and injured also included immigrants from Mexico and Trinidad.

The two construction workers killed at the adjacent site were both immigrants from Ecuador. Caguana Cosquillo, who lived in Bushwick, had been in the United States for about six years. His brother Carlos told WNBC-TV that he was the sole provider for his family, which includes a 4-year-old son and his wife, who is expecting their second child in the coming days. “Now that he’s gone, she is going through an immense amount of pain,” Carlos said.

Siguencia, who lived in the Bronx, had recently arrived from Ecuador and had just started working at the site, according to relatives and family friends. On Thursday morning his father, Luis, waited at the scene for news. “We went to four hospitals, and they haven’t given us any information,” he said. Sapon lived in Hell’s Kitchen in Manhattan.

The 18 injured include seven children and four firefighters hurt during the rescue operation. One person remains in critical condition. Crews were able to rescue several victims, including a toddler and a pregnant woman.

A resident of the collapsed building, Anderson Velez, told reporters his wife managed to call him from beneath the wreckage, screaming for help for their two sons before the line cut out. Rescue workers pulled all three from the debris alive.

The Brooklyn District Attorney’s Office, working with New York City’s Department of Buildings (DOB), is investigating whether criminal conduct contributed to the collapse. The immediate focus is the active earthwork at the construction site, where crews were digging and blasting rock to lay the foundation for a new luxury mixed-use development.

The project was approved for only three stories, but in September the developers filed plans with the DOB

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for a nine-story, 64-unit building, which had not yet been approved. Developers often use this bait-and-switch tactic to start construction faster and bypass heavier upfront scrutiny for larger towers.

Long before Wednesday's disaster, the site had already been flagged for reckless practices. The lot is owned through two limited liability companies registered to Judith Swimer and Faigy Fischman, which bought it for $3.99 million in 2024. Robert Fischman is listed as the project's owner in Buildings Department records.

In March, the DOB halted demolition after the contractor, N Tech Design of America, began tearing down a one-story building on the lot without the required overhead protection for neighboring properties, and fined it $2,500. The company kept demolishing. When inspectors returned in April, the building had been razed.

N Tech admitted the violation, which falls in the city's most serious class, and paid a $10,000 fine, a rounding error next to the price of the land and the projected value of the finished complex. In May, inspectors cited the site again for departing from approved plans and failing to protect adjacent properties. The shoring meant to hold up 1321 Flatbush during excavation was the responsibility of Townhouse Builders, which received its permit in September.

The construction was taking place right next to a structure the developers knew was susceptible to collapse. A pre-construction engineering survey conducted in March documented that the nearly century-old building at 1321 Flatbush Avenue already suffered from visible structural cracks and a "wide range of major deficiencies" along its north masonry facade.

The building has been owned since 1999 by Isolag Realty Corp., whose registered agent is Olufemi Falade. Farah Louis, the City Council member for the area, describes him as a problem landlord whose properties are not kept to code. Falade was jailed in 2006 for ignoring violations at another of his buildings, and 1321 Flatbush has gone through the city's tax lien sale at least five times since 2017.

The aging building had 98 open city housing violations, some dating back to the 1970s. Residents told the WSWS that building owners and developers were targeting the entire row of houses on Flatbush Avenue, hoping to tear down the existing apartment buildings and storefronts and replace them with "luxury" developments.

In response to Wednesday's disaster, Mamdani said the city is investigating 100 other active job sites linked to the developers and construction contractors.

The disaster goes far beyond a few bad actors cutting corners. Flatbush, a diverse, predominantly working-class area with significant numbers of immigrants from the Caribbean, Latin America and elsewhere, is in the midst of a massive wave of redevelopment.

Real estate speculation has driven average asking rents in the neighborhood past $3,400 a month, displacing many residents while confining others to deteriorating, unsafe buildings. More than a quarter of renter households in the neighborhood are considered "severely rent-burdened," meaning they spend more than 50 percent of their total household income on rent.

Mamdani's answer to the housing crisis has been to lean heavily into deregulation to spur the housing supply, notably through his SPEED (Streamlining Procedures to Expedite Equitable Development) Task Force and his "Block by Block" housing plan.

The Mamdani administration has focused on slashing "red tape," streamlining environmental reviews and shortening permitting timelines, providing a massive boost to developers' profits. This prioritization of developers above oversight inherently sacrifices safety. Despite his socialist pretensions, Mamdani defends housing as a private commodity and empowers the very real estate interests that exploit the working class.

Wednesday's tragedy comes after back-to-back weeks of deadly fires in the city. On November 5, a horrific fire tore through a residential building in Sunset Park, Brooklyn, killing six adults and injuring nine others. A week earlier, on October 28, a fire at the Patterson Houses in the Mott Haven neighborhood of the Bronx claimed the lives of a mother and her three sons.

Taken together, the 18 lives lost over the past few weeks to building collapse and fires are a devastating indictment of extreme social inequality in the city.

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