

Condo owners told to remove lofts in suites

Many residents in the building remodelled without first obtaining building permits.

ROBERT SAKTI

Vancouver Sun

City inspectors have warned more than 50 Vancouver condo owners they'll be ordered to dismantle lofts they built in their suites because the building materials used are combustible or the sprinkler system is inadequate.

The suites are in the Space building at 1238 Seymour, where many residents remodelled without first obtaining building permits.

The building was billed as an experiment in urban living by developer Brad Holme. It contains 23 floors of unfinished suites, most with five-metre (17-foot) ceilings—high enough to install an extra storey in the form of a loft.

Residents have spent thousands—in some cases tens of thousands—of dollars in "personalizing" their suites.

Councillor George Poul voted against allowing the project to proceed three years ago, and now he's in an I-told-you-so mood.

"I predicted this would happen at the time it was approved, we should never have allowed it," said Poul in an interview Monday.

"There's a safety problem. Those lofts have to be pulled down."

Poul said he suspects sales agents led buyers to believe the suites could be easily modified.

Condo owner Peter Ryznar said this is exactly what happened. Ryznar and his wife spent \$20,000 fixing up the concrete shell they had bought for \$169,000, installing hardwood floors and extending the loft to make a bedroom and sitting area.

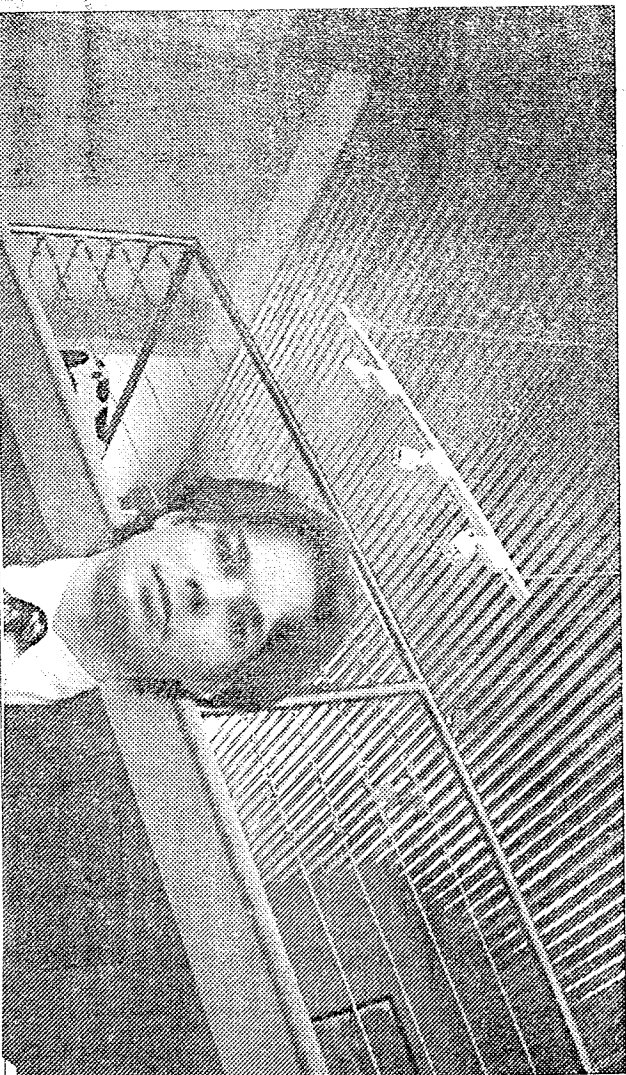
The problem is that the entire loft structure is built on wood beams, instead of steel.

"Most of us are first-time home-buyers, we're not law-breakers," he said. "We were led to believe by the sales people that we could do these additions, personalizing our units."

Ryznar, an advertising sales representative, acknowledged that buyers were given notice in writing that they needed a city building permit to do extensive renovations.

Please see City staff, B2

Headache looms overhead



City staff feared illegal lofts

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"But the whole sales pitch was, see no evil, hear no evil, nudge, nudge, wink, wink. We were told that these kinds of changes had been made in other buildings with no problems."

Realtor Ian Bailey of Macdonald Realty, the main marketer of the building, said he personally levelled with every prospective buyer.

"They were told they were taking their chances [with major renovations]," said Bailey.

"But we can't control what is said by independent [sales] agents."

The project has been controversial from day one. City staff opposed the building as too large for the site and said it was an invitation to build illegal lofts.

But planners were also interested in loft suites as a way of adding variety and affordability to the downtown mix. Now the planners are looking at ways of controlling the phenomenon.

"We want to plug the loopholes," said city planner Larry Beasley, who estimated a few thousand have already been built or are planned.

Holme is on holiday and could not be contacted Monday.

HOME OWNER: Peter Ryznar and others in his lofts: Ryznar spent \$20,000 building his loft and condominium tower have been told to rip out their says buyers were led astray by the developer

GLENN BAGLO/Vancouver Sun

Condo owners told to legalize problem lofts

FRANCES BULA
VANCOUVER SUN

The owners of a Vancouver building containing unauthorized lofts have been warned to find a way to legalize their premises or face having the lofts torn out by the city.

The action is being threatened as city council struggles to fix the problems created by its early attempts to allow artists' live/work buildings.

But people living at Artech, the 67-unit building that was the second live/work complex built, said Thursday many of the low-income artists in the building can't afford the solutions city staff are suggesting.

One of those proposals is that unit owners pay \$2,000 and \$4,000 apiece to buy extra density for their building.

Artech residents say they shouldn't have to pay for the city's errors as it learned the hard way how to regulate live/work buildings.

"We want to see if you can take the pioneers out of the onus of paying for these mistakes," said Valerie Hennell, a

SEE COMPLEX, B3

COMPLEX from B1

Fire sprinkler system sparks city's concern

musician who lives in the building.

In spite of their arguments, however, councillors voted unanimously to ensure that prospective buyers are made aware of the loft problems.

The problem for the city is that the complex's units were built with ceilings double the height of normal apartments and buyers were told by the realtor they could install lofts. But the building, constructed by developer Brad Holme, was actually already built to the maximum floor space allowable for its zoning.

After Holme built several buildings like that and concerns started to arise about the proliferation of illegal lofts, council changed the bylaw governing live/work units to assume lofts would be built into double-height units. However, building inspectors are still trying to cope with the early buildings. With Artech, the major concern is that the lofts interfere with the sprinkling systems.

However, owners can't get permits to put additional sprinkling systems under their lofts because the lofts are illegal.

And the lofts can't be legalized until the owners find some way to increase the allowed density for the whole building, either by getting permission from the board of variance, giving the city one of the units to use as a cultural-event space in exchange for density, or buying density from another heritage building. This is the second building where inspectors have warned owners to legalize their lofts or face getting an order to tear them out. Another Brad Holme building on Seymour Street faces the same problem, as do at least two other buildings.