

Millrise fire victims may get break on property taxes

BY KIM GUTTORMSON, CALGARY HERALD APRIL 13, 2010 5:45 AM



A resident of the Canvas at Millrise condo complex snapped this picture of a fire in the early stages on a 4th floor balcony Thursday, before fleeing the building to safety.

Photograph by: Courtesy, Andrew Jackson

The city will explore a policy to give homeowners who have lost houses or condos to fire a break on their property taxes.

What started as giving owners of the 159 Millrise condo units destroyed in a massive fire last month a reprieve was expanded to look at any home lost to fire.

"We just had a fire go through Citadel," Ald. Gord Lowe said, referring to five homes wiped out in December. "I wonder how that is any different from (Millrise)?"

Ald. Bob Hawkesworth said, to be fair, the city should look at a policy that would help anyone who lost a home in a fire.

"You can't say yes to some citizens, we sympathize with you, but to another citizen who has also lost property, say no to," Hawkesworth said. "At least when (the policy) comes back, administration will have thought through some principles that could be applied in some of these circumstances to address fairly and equitably everyone."

A report expected in May will look at what the cost would be to give a tax break on the municipal portion of the bill and how a potential policy could work.

Ald. Diane Colley-Urquhart initiated the discussion by asking about a break for Millrise residents.

Her request stemmed from the fact the city gave similar consideration to those who owned units destroyed in the 2002 Erlton condo building fire.

In that case, owners were given a break on part of the municipal portion of their tax bill for the percentage of the year after the fire, said David Watson, the city's general manager of planning, development and assessment.

He added in the Erlton case the waiving of taxes was based on need, with about 80 of 157 owners getting a break.

Owners would still be required to pay property tax on the value of the land, but the portion relating to the building would be adjusted.

Cameron Wallace, president of the Millrise condo board, said assistance would be helpful.

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