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Alderman condemns grow houses

Vacated drug properties could face wrecking ball if owners don't step in and clean them up

By [SHAWN LOGAN](#), SUN MEDIA

Shuttered marijuana grow-ops staining Calgary neighbourhoods could soon be facing the wrecking ball if owners refuse to clean them up.

With 99 active former grow-ops spread throughout the city, some vacant since 2005, Ald. Diane Colley-Urquhart wants the city to step in and demolish the potentially dangerous homes whose owners won't remediate them and cover the costs by acquiring the properties.

"The fact of the matter is it's unacceptable that these condemned properties can just sit there in these neighbourhoods for two or three years," she said.

"What we need to do is find out who owns these properties and give them a period of time to clean them up or they'll be bulldozed and the cost will be reduced by acquiring the property."

An online registry of former grow-ops compiled by Alberta Health Services (AHS) lists 419 inactive files in Calgary in addition to the 99 active properties that dot dozens of neighbourhoods, primarily the suburbs.

Colley-Urquhart, who sits on the Stop Grow Ops Calgary Coalition board, said often the owners of former drug houses are nothing more than numbered companies, making them difficult to pursue for remediation costs.

And without clean up, the condemned homes can sit for years with a likelihood of structural damage and contamination from chemicals used in drug processing.

"There are all kinds of hazards with these neighbourhood drug factories and we can't have these things sitting condemned and vacant for years," Colley-Urquhart said.

Ald. Brian Pincott said while the notion of condemned houses with any number of potential health hazards is a concern, leaving demolished properties in the middle of family neighbourhoods with no future plans could create just as many problems.

"We've got a building closed up and we go in and knock it down and have a hole in the ground and what happens then?" he asked.

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Colley-Urquhart said she's still working with fire Chief Bruce Burrell to hammer out a plan to deal with the vacated grow-ops.

She said she is planning to come to council with a motion to address them this year.