

Mr. Amarjeet Sohi  
Mayor  
City Hall  
City of Edmonton

Dear Mayor Sohi, Edmonton City Council, Police Chief McFee, and the Edmonton Police Commission

CC: Councilor Ashley Salvador, Councilor Anne Stevenson, MLA Janis Irwin, MLA David Shepherd, MP Blake Desjarlais, MP Randy Boissonnault

We are writing to you today about our growing concern regarding the escalating number of problem properties in our community of Alberta Avenue. My husband and I moved to Alberta Avenue in 2006 during the revitalization initiative of the Alberta Avenue District. We have dedicated our careers in the social service sector and embody strong community building values, so moving into an emerging neighborhood was very exciting for the both us. We fell in love with the potential of transforming our community through the arts, building relationship and connections and by encouraging strong neighborhood participation. There is so much about our community that we are proud of and we want to stay here for years to come.

While we don't regret moving here, there is one issue that we MUST speak up about: the increasing number of problem properties in the Alberta Avenue District. Problem properties include properties that involve constant calls to 311, 911, and other police departments to report illegal activity, animal neglect and violence. Problem properties also include derelict, boarded-up homes and empty, unkempt properties. The number of properties like these have been increasing in this area to the detriment of our safety, health and wellbeing.

Abandoned and derelict houses and businesses get broken into by people who have nowhere to go, or do not want to use the housing provided to them. Often, these properties experience fires due to drug use, or simply from people who are trying to keep warm. They also attract significant attention by arsonists which result in a number of houses and businesses going up in flames in our observations over the past two years. This is a serious threat to nearby houses and families and has caused damage to surrounding structures and people's morale.

This issue compounded by an ever increasing gang and drug dealing presence, has caused and continues to cause a community exodus, particularly of families with children and seniors who have the means to move to a safer area. Children have witnessed these deliberately set fires and are being deeply traumatized by this threat to their safety. Children, youth and women are being approached by drug dealers, pimps, gang members in our community, so we feel helpless and like victims in our community.

Why should we be forced to leave the community we love and helped rebuild over 17 years?. Furthermore, the increasing need for city resources to deal with these properties by way of fire, police and EMS response, as well as city bylaw standards, is becoming very costly to all taxpayers.

Problem properties attract a criminal element that brings danger into our community. There are numerous landlords who we know do not care who they rent to. As we stated before, we as residents have witnessed an increase in garage and house break-ins, an increased number of sex-workers and aggressive johns, extremely high numbers of drug poisonings, and more violence on the streets. We have had more gun violence and police requests for service in 2021 than we have ever before. This is not fair to those residents who take pride in their homes and want to stay in our community.

Surely there is something that can be done to put pressure on problem property landlords. There are many responsible landlords who manage their properties well, but the slum landlords who refuse to maintain their properties need to know there are consequences for their lack of responsibility. They do not care that their lack of attention has such a negative effect on our community.

If you choose to do nothing to address this situation, you will be failing our kids, seniors and our whole community.

Yours Sincerely,

Karina Hurtado & Douglas Piquette