

Dear Mr. Paul Mochrie and Ms. Corrie Okell,

We are writing to bring serious concerns to your attention regarding the relationship between the City of Vancouver and Larco Investments. In the wake of our ongoing strike at the Sheraton Vancouver Airport hotel, tenants from other properties owned by Larco have come to us looking for support. We write as a coalition of Vancouver workers and tenants, demanding justice for those impacted by the business practices of a powerful developer.

This letter alleges that the City has failed to hold Larco Investments accountable to Standards of Maintenance Bylaws, specifically regarding unresolved issues at 1225 Cardero St and 5455 Balsam St. The following information, provided by tenants of the properties, illustrates the extent of the problem:

City's Failure to Ensure Larco Complies with Municipal Bylaws:

Larco Investments Inc is a prominent landlord and developer in Vancouver. It owns the apartment buildings at 1225 Cardero St and 5455 Balsam St, which it manages through Maple Leaf Property Management.

The City of Vancouver was first made aware of the dysfunctional ventilation system at 1225 Cardero St in September 2017 [15]. At that time, city inspectors confirmed that the HVAC ventilation system throughout the building was not working properly, and the landlord was in breach of the Standards of Maintenance and Building Bylaws, ordering them to make repairs [15]. However, City Staff did not properly verify whether the repairs had been completed to standard and did not proceed with prosecuting Larco.

In December 2018, the landlord claimed that repairs were complete [3]. A letter from Mike Collister, then Manager of Property Use Inspections, in March 2019 to City officials shows that they were aware that the ventilation issues in the building were not resolved [2]. In addition, Collister's letter reveals that the Chief Building Official accepted an amateur contractor's assertion that the ventilation was working and did not independently verify those claims [2]. Instead, they chose to take Larco's contractor's word at face value.

An engineering progress report from November 15, 2018 stated that Larco must make long-term repairs to "provide ventilation air directly ducted to each suite" [1]. The temporary fix—using duct tape to seal vent grills—was meant to be a short-term solution [1]. Seven years later, these temporary measures remain in place [4, 5]. A City of Vancouver inspection report from March 2024 corroborates that to date, the ventilation system remains in violation of Standard Maintenance Bylaws 21.8 and 21.9 [4].

From September 2017 to March 2024, tenants at 1225 Cardero Street have repeatedly raised complaints to the City about Larco's ongoing failure to comply with the Standards of Maintenance Bylaws. The City has consistently failed to ensure that Larco complies with the law. This year, City prosecutors indicated they would investigate the matter further, and then stopped responding to tenants [8]. The City has the authority to prosecute Larco for its failure to maintain its building according to city bylaws but has chosen not to do so.

Since that time, tenants report having suffered from health consequences such as allergies, migraines, respiratory symptoms, chronic bronchitis, sinus infections and other problems [5]. The lack of ventilation has caused mold to grow in their units, exposed them to lingering smells from their neighbours' homes, and made them vulnerable to extreme heat and wildfire smoke [5]. A representative from UNITE HERE Local 40 helped collect testimony from tenants, and observed that every unit they entered had no ventilation in the kitchen.

Recently, the landlord provided notices to tenants for entry to replace bathroom fans [6, 7]. However, on the scheduled dates, the contractor either did not show up or merely took photos without performing any actual repairs [8].

Lack of Response from City Officials:

The Chief Building Officer, Saul Schwebs, is now overseeing this matter. Repeated attempts to contact Mr. Schwebs for updates on the City of Vancouver's order have gone unanswered [8]. The lawyer of the tenants, Karen Segal, has contacted the Chief Building Officer, who is in charge of this case and Mr. Schwebs has ignored her email [8]. The lawyer also contacted the City Prosecutor's office with no answers either [8]. Aissa Aggoune, a tenant of the property, has contacted Mr. Schwebs multiple times to receive updates and has yet to receive an answer.

More than 4 months have passed since March 2024 and the tenants still do not have proper ventilation. Last time, after it took the City of Vancouver more than 10 months to begin prosecuting Larco into compliance, the city prosecutor dropped the prosecution a few months later without a valid reason [16]. This led to where we are today, 6 years later, the exact same situation, with indoor air pollution impacting up to 170 families living in the building. When will the City of Vancouver take action against Larco to ensure compliance for their violation?

Urgent Health Concerns:

The ongoing ventilation issues pose a significant health risk to approximately 170 families, including children and elderly residents, especially with the current heatwave and the expected wildfire smoke later in the summer. In the past week, many tenants have filed 311 reports about the extreme temperatures inside their apartments, which have reached over 40° C. These urgent issues will continue to worsen, exacerbating the pre-existing health consequences of a malfunctioning HVAC ventilation system [18].

Similar Issues at 5455 Balsam St:

While there are many outstanding maintenance issues at the existing building of 5455 Balsam St, the most pressing one from a safety standpoint is the gas-fired boiler, which failed multiple times last winter, leaving the building without heat for days at a time.

When a tenant spoke with boiler mechanics as they were performing one of the repairs, they told him the boiler should be condemned [10]. Two complaints were filed with Technical Safety BC in October 2023, one of which was also sent to Tim Tam, a property inspector for the City of

Vancouver [9, 11]. Tenants report that whenever a contractor refused to make repairs on the boiler due to its age, Larco simply dismissed them and found another who would [9]. On October 10, 2023, Mr. Tam was informed that the initial repair was insufficient, and that the heat had failed again [12]. Tam was made aware of another failure on November 6, 2023 [13].

Did members of City Staff accept inaccurate reports from contractors hired by Larco? Maple Leaf Property Management has not responded to tenants' continued requests to perform preventative maintenance on the boiler, before it breaks again this winter.

Considering the danger associated with a dysfunctional boiler, and Larco's failure to perform fire inspections at the building [14], tenants are increasingly worried of this leading to a disaster.

Another tenant reports that when she spoke to Fiona Cho, a city official responding to complaints about the condition of the pool (which has been unusable for four years due to Larco's failure to maintain it after Covid), she was dismissive of the safety risks it poses. The pool is now drained of water and is a safety hazard for residents who use the outdoor area. Ms. Cho said the pool area is not a hazard because it's gated and nobody can enter, and said tenants have no reason to go near it, suggesting they shouldn't use the outdoor area which they pay for [17].

We urge City Managers Mr. Paul Mochrie and Mrs. Corrie Okell to thoroughly investigate the City of Vancouver's conduct in this matter. It is difficult to understand why the City would overlook repeat violations of Standards of Maintenance Bylaws, and why they would allow these problems to persist for so long.

We request that the City Managers urgently examine the relationship between Larco and the City to ensure that the City is operating independently of Larco's influence and acting in the best interests of Vancouver's citizens, rather than powerful developers. In failing to hold Larco accountable to the law, the City may bear responsibility for any harm experienced by the tenants of their buildings.

Thank you for your attention to this urgent matter. I look forward to your prompt action to protect the rights and well-being of the affected tenants.



Zailda Chan

President, UNITE HERE Local 40

Co-signed by tenants:

DocuSigned by:
Aissa Aggoune
B08E3FFF03C84E6...
Aissa Aggoune

Signed by:
Bhavna Solecki
A2E19A9C72DC45A...
Bhavna Solecki

Signed by:
Illeana Madrid
E830A4A7580A477...
Illeana Madrid

Signed by:
Daniel Kasowitz
3DD87BFF25B64B0...
Daniel Kasowitz

~~Jacqueline Jamieson~~

Signed by:
John Tierney
57824EF6E3D54DA...
John Tierney