

September 6, 2018

Report on 1864 Harvey Avenue – Former Ponderosa Motel

History of Attendance to Property by Fire Department

Kelowna Fire Department personnel have attended to the Property to respond to fires in October 2011, January and February 2012, and more recently in February 2018. The Property is a former motel, the Ponderosa Motel, which has been vacant for several years.

The February 20, 2018 incident report records that a total of 15 Fire Department staff attended the Property in response to a report of a fire received just before 9 am. Smoke was observed on arrival coming from the chimney of one of the abandoned motel unit buildings. Inside one of the units there was smoke and open flame, as well as a single occupant, sleeping in the smoke-filled room. The occupant was escorted out while the attack crew extinguished the fire. The occupant attempted to flee the scene as the attending RCMP officer was about to interview him. The RCMP were able to catch up to the individual and determine that he did not require medical treatment.

It was determined that the fire had been caused by the occupant, a squatter, who had lit a fire in the fireplace to stay warm. He fell asleep on the floor and the fire spread from the fireplace to nearby rubbish. It was fortunate that the Fire Department units were able to respond promptly. Had the response time been longer, it is conceivable that the squatter occupying the fire-damaged unit could have suffered burn injuries or expired from smoke inhalation or burns.

Insecurity of Buildings and Property

The Property has a modu-lok fence along the south entrance to Harvey Avenue, extending from the south wall at the end of the former motel unit to the east property boundary. On a site visit on August 7, 2018 I observed the modu-lok fencing was not secure and that it did not provide a sufficient barrier to prevent intrusion from would be squatters or others. There were clear signs of squatters living on the Property. I observed a blanket, clothing and a mattress pulled out for sleeping. On my arrival I could hear someone climbing over the rear fence to leave the Property. I assume this person was “spooked” by my presence. No one else, apart from Bylaw Officer Ingvarsson who was also present, was observed on the Property during the course of my August 7, 2018 inspection.

PJ/mb



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The motel unit building in the southwest quadrant of the Property had been secured with plywood but it had been removed at the rear of the building, revealing a broken window, providing access to the interior of the motel unit. There were two large dumpsters filled with construction materials and old furniture. The dumpsters were located in the centre portion of the Property. This appeared to be a relatively safe location in that it was located away from the buildings. However, the rear door of one of the bins had been opened and a number of mattresses had been pulled out and were strewn on the ground around the dumpster. The rear building on the north side of the Property appeared to have some structural damage to the upper north-west corner. There were several blocks missing from the upper parapet of the roof line. The cinder block had collapsed inwards and the roof line may have collapsed.

The insecure condition of the Property contravenes the British Columbia Fire Code and the City of Kelowna's Fire and Life Safety Bylaw No. 10760. Sentence 2.4.6(1) of the British Columbia Fire Code, 2012, requires that "vacant buildings shall be secured against unauthorized entry. Sentence 8.7.2(b) of Bylaw City of Kelowna, Fire and Life Safety Bylaw 10760 requires that "all openings in the premises are securely closed and fastened in a manner acceptable to the Fire Chief or designate so as to prevent fires and the entry of unauthorized persons."

In my assessment, the vacant condition of the Property, along with the lack of effective security to prevent entry by squatters and other unauthorized persons, makes the Property attractive as a site to squat. Provisions must be made to permanently secure the site in conformance with the regulation set forth in the BC Fire Code and Bylaw 10760 to prevent the abandoned structures from being damaged from fire as well as mitigate the consequent risk of injury or death to any transient occupants.

Respectfully submitted,



Paul Johnson, Fire Inspector, Local Assistant to Fire Commissioner
Kelowna Fire Department

PJ/mb

