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OCTOBER 5, 2017

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SOUTH EDITION



Justin Greaves/Metroland

## FUTURE UNKNOWN

Cindi Suddick lives at the East Side Motel – a dismal place where rodents run through the roof and electricity fails easily. She and other tenants have made the best of the bad conditions and now, they're facing eviction

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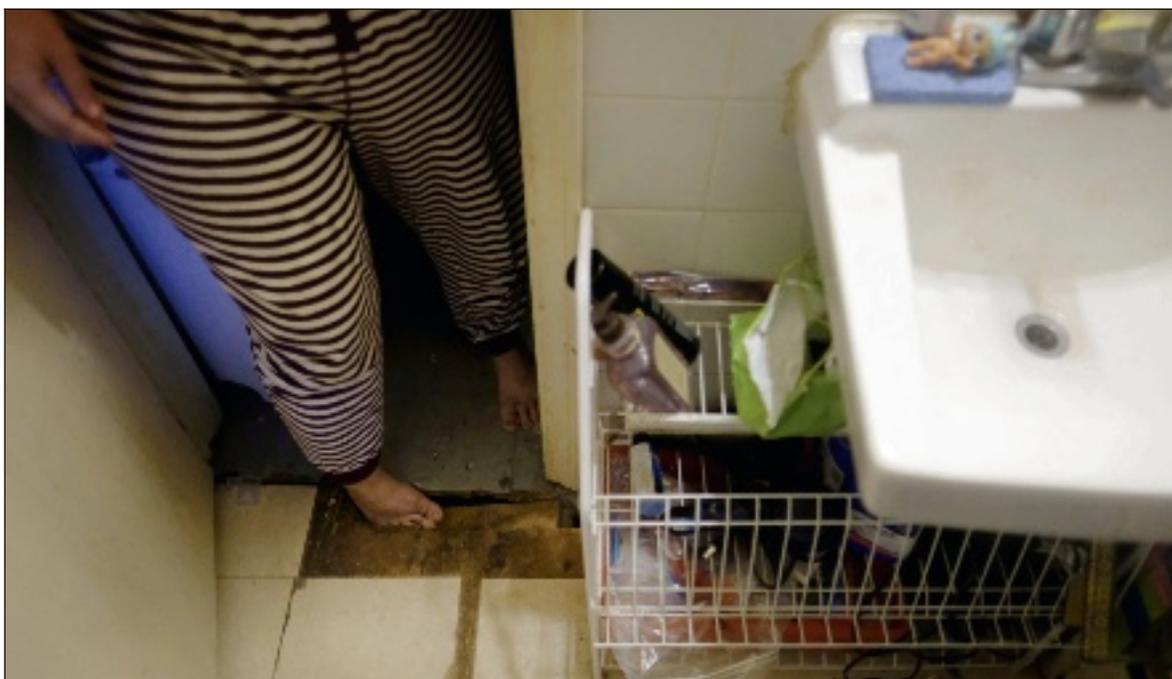
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# Residents awaiting end for East Side Motel



People living at the East Side Motel on Kingston Road face eviction within weeks as the City of Toronto moves to either buy or expropriate the property. Many have been at the motel for years, and say East Side's bad reputation isn't deserved. Sue, top, has been living here for more than five years with her family, and pays \$340 weekly. Sue's ceiling has multiple holes from animals breaking through. Above, Mary Anne Woodcock steps on the rotting floor in her bathroom. Her family of four pays \$375 a week to stay in the two-room suite. Right, the exterior of the motel.

Justin Greaves/Metroland



**MIKE ADLER**  
madler@insidetoronto.com

Raccoons have fallen through a square hole in Sue and Kerry's bathroom ceiling, patched with garbage bags, and near the front door there's a larger ceiling hole, blocked by a sagging tarp, nails and duct tape.

This suite of rooms at Scarborough's East Side Motel has been the couple's home, and home to their two adopted children, for more than five years.

They pay their landlord \$340 a week, but as Sue sat on the couch, a visitor heard the scrapings of animals above her in the rotted roof.

"It's bad. There's nothing you can do to make it better," says Sue, a tow truck dispatcher.

The couple don't want their last names used, but say in the winter, you can sometimes see your breath inside the suite.

Most of the windows are plastic. You need pliers to operate the kitchen sink. There's hot water sometimes; the shower works sometimes.

People at the East Side, and there are perhaps 40 tenants here, including some children, say they're trapped: the landlord takes most of what they earn, and tacks on \$30 every day the rent is late, several tenants say.

Many say they don't have enough money to go anywhere else.

And yet, all have to go, and soon. The City of Toronto, after buying the former Comfort Inn East next door in 2015 to convert it into a residence for homeless seniors, intends to demolish the motel.

Last month, Scarborough Southwest Coun. Gary Crawford said the city, if it can't reach a friendly agreement to buy the property "very near in the future"

will proceed with an expropriation Crawford said is "probably weeks away."

In interviews, East Side residents say they want the public to know the motel's unsavory reputation in the neighbourhood isn't deserved.

"We get a little bit tired of being called drug addicts because we live here," said Cindi Suddick, adding almost all motel regulars are everyday, working people without the savings or credit to live somewhere better.

"You get into a bind and you can't get out. And nobody's looking for a handout; they're just looking for a hand to get out," Suddick says.

People heard about the expropriation and are on edge, she says, "wondering, 'Is tomorrow the day?'"

Suddick lives with her daughter, Mary Anne Woodcock, her son-in-law and a seven-year-old granddaughter in a suite they say costs \$375 a week.

Shelves in the cramped front room are filled with clothes, toys, or food. Woodcock used concrete cement spray to patch a ceiling hole over her mother's bed, and a sagging floorboard outside the bathroom, she says, "makes me nervous that the floor's going to go at some point."

She, her husband and their child sleep in the suite's other room. "My whole room's a bed."

To plug in the microwave or other appliance, Woodcock says, people first have to disconnect their air conditioners, or the electricity "pops" and must be restarted.

Other residents say such outages are common. Margaret, who also didn't reveal her last name, showed visitors restarting power to her suite means a walk through

● See WE, page 23





Justin Greaves/Metroland

Clockwise from left, Margaret has to walk through the decaying basement of the building on Kingston Road to reach the fuse box whenever she loses power; Tape and plastic bags are used to stop animals from coming into the living room and bathroom of Sue and Kerry's suite; the vacant suite next to another family living in the motel has been left unlocked after a tenant moved out more than a year ago.



## 'We pay \$2,000 a month to live here. That's beyond insane.': tenant

● from page 22

a dusty, mouldy former basement ballroom, to a small, unlit room with a junction box for her part of the motel.

"We pay \$2,000 a month to live here. That's beyond insane," she says.

People say they don't live at the East Side by choice, but getting out is next to impossible.

Nobody has called the city to complain about conditions because they're scared about losing their homes, Sue says. "Where are they going to go?"

The motel and its seven acres at 3300 Kingston Rd. is owned by Kahlon Family Holdings Ltd. Its assessed value rose from \$794,000 in 2012 to \$2,292,000 in 2017, according to Municipal Property Assessment Corporation.

Certain tenants work for the Kahlon family, minding the office

and performing other tasks, in return for reduced rent, Metroland Media was told.

On Tuesday, Minty Kahlon, a real estate agent, confirmed she and her mother manage the motel, but said she didn't "have any information to give out" on its possible expropriation.

"We haven't been given any letters, nothing," says Kahlon, declining to answer more questions that day about the motel.

Reached while working at the motel on Wednesday, Kahlon said rents are set according to common sense and competition. "If you call the other motels, that's what they charge," she says.

Asked directly about a \$30 late fee, Kahlon said she was too busy to speak further - "My hands are full right now" - but would call the reporter back.

In interviews, East Side residents say other Scarborough land-

lords ask for first and last month's rent, and refuse tenants with bad credit.

Going to a shelter means giving pets away, and for Kerry and Sue, it means separation from their son, who's nearly 21.

Their family dreams of a safe two-bedroom apartment.

"I just want a nice kitchen, to make a nice dinner. That's all I want," Sue says.

Suddick and her family also fear being split up when the time comes.

"This place has allowed us to stay together," Woodcock says.

Crawford says the city is sensitive to East Side residents' needs. "We'll be doing everything we can to ensure a proper transition," says the councillor. "We'll work incredibly hard."

Patricia Anderson, a manager for Toronto's Shelter, Support and Housing Administration, says city

housing workers "can often resolve" issues around bad credit "by talking with landlords to discuss different ways to satisfy his or her need to know that the rent will be paid on time."

"Housing workers can also be very resourceful in identifying housing and any housing benefits that a family might be eligible for," Anderson added.

Crawford says some amenity, possibly a daycare, will replace the motel after a neighbourhood consultation.

"People in the community have wanted this motel gone for a long time," he says. "The goal right now is just to get it out of there."

In April, as Toronto councillors cleared the way for expropriation, a staff report told them the motel had "long been the subject of local community complaint and concern for a variety of reasons."

Conditions for residents "are re-

ally pretty dire," says Judy Croon, a weekly visitor with City Street Outreach, a group delivering towels, sheets, toiletries - none of which are supplied by East Side management - as well as bread, toys, small pieces of furniture and other items.

"There's a lot of people going there that have absolutely nothing."

A comedian, Croon interviewed Outreach founder Alex Smirnis for a podcast and became one of the charity's volunteers. At the East Side, she's seen how residents "have each other's back."

"I'm inspired by the strength, the gratitude, the fortitude that these people have," Croon says.

Woodcock distributes donated goods at the motel and joins the group on rounds in Scarborough and downtown.

"There's always someone in worse shape," she says.



Rick Madonik/Toronto Star

Anthony Stewart splits the defence during NHL action between Toronto Maple Leafs and Atlanta Thrashers at Air Canada Centre in 2011. Stewart and his family spent four years at Scarborough's East Side Motel.

# Anthony Stewart recalls life at East Side Motel

**MIKE ADLER**  
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Scarborough's East Side Motel isn't fit to live in, says Anthony Stewart, the elder of two professional-hockey-playing brothers who spent four of their childhood years there.

"I am appalled that place is still standing," Stewart wrote after seeing a Metro-Land Media story about the Kingston Road motel and conditions for its tenants.

"My only regret is not making enough money playing in the NHL to buy the property and tear it to the ground."

The City of Toronto placed Stewart's parents and the family's seven children - Anthony and brother Chris and their five younger sisters, in the East Side - from 1996 to 2000.

Toronto's shelter spaces for families were overflowing then, and the city made extensive use of Kingston Road motels.

Stewart, 32, who suited up for the Florida Panthers, Carolina Hurricanes and Atlanta Thrashers, said it's an understatement to say living standards at the East Side "were disgusting."

"I remember mice running across the bed in which

three of my brothers and sisters shared, sometimes being in the toilet as well," he recalled.

"Hot water was scarce, as I remember my mother heating up water on the stove to draw a bath."

Prostitution and drug use were "rampant" in the area, recalled Stewart, who added he doesn't remember a police presence around the motel.

"I could go on and on but that place should not be habitable and if anyone actually saw the living conditions they would be sickened."

The story of the Stewarts - both Anthony and Chris, 30, who plays for the Minnesota Wild - was known to current tenants of their old East Side suite, a family of four.

That the brothers escaped such a life was a point of pride to them as they dealt with ceiling holes and hot water available only sometimes.

Tenants say the motel doesn't deserve a reputation as a place where addicts and prostitutes live. They are there, they say, because they don't have the savings to go someplace better.

"This place is a nightmare that we all want to wake up from," one man, a

current tenant, wrote last month.

Anthony Stewart may get his wish next year: the city, after trying to buy the property for two years so the building could be torn down, initiated expropriation proceedings on Oct. 6.

Motel owners Kahlon Family Holdings Inc. are due in court Dec. 15 to face provincial offences charge of failing to comply with a city order to fix five property standards deficiencies.

Patrick Di Monte, their lawyer, has said the Kahlon family won't comment on the motel "until we see some path to a resolution" with the city over the expropriation.

Both Stewart brothers went from Kingston Road to the Kingston Frontenacs of the Ontario Hockey League. Anthony was drafted a first-round pick in 2003 by the Florida Panthers, going on to join the Thrashers and Hurricanes before his NHL career ended in 2013. He has continued playing hockey in different leagues.

Chris Stewart, off to a good start with six goals and two assists in his first 13 games, has also played for the Colorado Avalanche, St. Louis Blues, Buffalo Sabres and Anaheim Ducks.



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# Tenants seek return of rents as expropriation nears

*'I'm not a bad woman,' says East Side Motel's owner*

MIKE ADLER

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Tenants are shivering through another winter at East Side Motel, while on a day last week the motel's visiting owner seemed resigned to seeing the battered building expropriated and demolished this year.

"The deal will be done soon," said owner Roni Kahlon.

Tenants paying weekly rent to Kahlon and her family told The Scarborough Mirror about holes in the ceilings and floors in their suites, lack of heat, and unreliable electricity and water.

Two families are in dispute with Kahlon Family Holdings Ltd. at the province's Landlord and Tenant Board.

The Kahlons applied last fall to evict them for rent arrears; the tenant families stopped paying rent in December and want the board to refund their last year of rent.

"They're not paying me rent (for) three, four months. If they don't like my place, they can move out," Kahlon said in the motel office on Jan. 29.

"And if they're not paying me rent, why are they still complaining?"

A few days later, councillors voted to give the City of Toronto legal authority to force the sale of 1.63 acres on Kingston Road Kahlon and her late husband bought 22 years ago.

Its assessed value in



Dan Pearce/Metroland

East Side Motel tenant Kerry speaks with a friend during a visit by Scarborough Mirror reporters.

2017 was \$2.29 million but the city, despite offering to buy it since 2015, hasn't met her price, Kahlon said, or she'd agree to sell "today."

In 2015, she added, the Kahlons were about to repair the broken roof over four or five suites when they heard the city wanted their land.

The roof wasn't repaired. "Don't waste your money," Kahlon said her family was told.

Some "rent" she referred to was in \$30 late fees she assigns to tenants when they don't pay on time. Tenants say such fees

are the "rent arrears" Kahlon is claiming in a bid to evict them.

Kahlon said such fees, done to "alert" tenants it's time to pay, are justified. "This is an alert for you guys: be on time," she explained.

"Other people just change the lock."

Sue and Kerry, tenants for more than five years, sat in the suite shared with their two adult children. There's almost no heat in the main room, none in the bedrooms, and taps only work sometimes. Last fall, Sue opened the plastic covering on a bathroom ceiling

hole.

A rat "the size of a cat" tumbled out, she said. "It was dead but it fell off on me. It hit me in the head, and it fell into the bathtub."

Kerry and Sue (who don't want their last names published) said they stopped paying rent, \$340 a week, on Dec. 14. "All we're asking for is a livable environment," Sue said.

Mary Woodcock, who lives with her mother, husband and daughter in another suite, believes 21 people still stay in Kahlon's motel, all paying cash each week to live in poor conditions.

"The fact is, she's a bully. She thinks this is OK," said Woodcock, whose family, like Kerry and Sue's, seeks a rent abatement from the board refunding what they paid the Kahlons over the last year, plus damages for pain and suffering.

"The only reason she doesn't want this place gone is it's her cash cow."

Petrea McConvey of the Scarborough Community Legal Clinic represents both families, and said they overpaid, and were threatened with eviction if they didn't.

Landlords are obliged

to keep rooms in livable condition, and East Side's owners failed to do that, McConvey argued.

The owner argued to the board both families are just motel guests, not tenants, but on Jan. 31 the board decided Woodcock's family didn't fit that description.

Further clouding the dispute is the family's charge - one Kahlon denies - that mail warning of their required appearances at the tribunal was kept from them.

Kahlon said tenants pick up mail at the office. "Why should we be keeping their mail?"

She said she was diagnosed with cancer in 2016, and has since spent a lot of time recovering. "I'm not a bad woman," she said.

"This is my business, this is my bread and butter."

Kahlon said she doesn't go inside the rooms or see what tenants are doing there, even with those few at East Side who work for her. Tenants are sometimes verbally abusive; she's learned not to talk to them, she added.

Gary Crawford, the local councillor, said city staff expect to take possession of the motel sometime this spring. After that, they are committed to get tenants into stable housing, he pledged this week.

Tenants, however, aren't impressed with the city's assistance so far. Kerry showed a reporter an email response from one of Crawford's assistants, advising her and Sue to apply to a city shelter, and to call 311 if they need emergency shelter.

"They don't want anything to do with us," Sue concluded.

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# EAST SIDE EVICTIONS

THE CITY IS CLOSING DOWN THE NOTORIOUS EAST SIDE MOTEL AND RELOCATING TENANTS, BUT SOME ARE WORRIED ABOUT THEIR LONG-TERM PROSPECTS /P8



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# TENANTS LIVED IN UNTENABLE CONDITIONS, BUT HAD FEW OPTIONS

## 'I DON'T EVEN HAVE PROPER ID FOR A BANK ACCOUNT': TENANT

MIKE ADLER  
madler@toronto.com

Life at Scarborough's East Side Motel is ending, finally, but some tenants who had stayed in untenable conditions couldn't see a way out of the poverty and hopelessness which kept them there.

The City of Toronto took legal possession of the dilapidated Kingston Road building Thursday, Aug. 9, sending men door to door with nail guns to board up windows.

It used power of expropriation to take the property after three years of offering to buy it, so the city could tear down what many considered a neighbourhood blight. Expropriation means owner Kahlon Family Holdings Ltd. will be paid at least market value for the property, assessed at \$2,292,000 in 2017.

The sheriff, tenants heard, was coming Friday at 11 a.m., to make sure all but one motel suite was empty.

On Thursday, Paul Batta threw a last scattering of peanuts to squirrels in the parking lot, convinced he would be homeless the following day, and would probably lose his job, too.

A full-time warehouse hand at a Malvern factory, Batta has been living at the

hotel since 2015, most of his earnings going to weekly rent for a little room.

He makes \$14.70 an hour, he said, about \$900 every two weeks. The cheapest motel on a list city housing workers gave him would charge him \$470 a week, he said.

The city said it might pay his first and last month's rent on an apartment. "What's that going to do if I can't get a place that'll take me?" asked Batta. "I tried to rent a van today; I don't have a credit card."

In a room at the far end was Johnny Kenthol, a former truck driver on disability who'd been there 10 years, and believed he'd be forced to leave with nothing but his clothes.

"Out the door I go," he said.

"Schoolyards, streets, sewer - who knows?"

Like others, Kenthol was promised \$5,200 as part of the city's expropriation. He could use it to relocate with his girlfriend and dog, he said, but he didn't have it yet.

"I don't even have proper ID for a bank account."

Some rooms at East Side were uninhabitable. Others were rented by the week or day until the very end, despite having holes, rot, and unreliable water, power and heating.



**THE ISSUE:**  
NOTORIOUS MOTEL NEARS ITS END  
**THE IMPACT:**  
DISPLACED TENANTS WORRY ABOUT THEIR FUTURES

Dan Pearce/Metroland

The East Side Motel sign is blacked out prior to the City of Toronto taking possession. FRONT: Kerry Leadbeater stands in front of her former unit at the East Side Motel. Her family was expected to move to a new apartment mid-month.

Tenants, often vulnerable and unable to rent apartments because of addictions, bad credit or attachment to their pets, paid surprisingly high rents; two families say they paid \$340 and \$375 each week.

"Occupants," as owner Roni Kahlon informed her tenants in May, would "continue to be responsible to pay rent to the motel management up to the date of the move-out."

Kenthol had no kind words for Kahlon: "A lot of guys here are working for a living. She kept them so financially restricted, they got no savings."

Though details are scarce, people say some tenants died alone in their rooms.

Mary Anne Woodcock, who moved last month to a Scarborough Village high-rise with her mother, husband and eight-year-old child, spent 22 months with them at East Side, and was back there Thursday.

"It's so sad. So many lives lost, so many overdoses," she said as plywood covered another window.

Her two-bedroom apartment is a new start, and she's grateful, she said, but with her new rent \$1,650, plus hydro and insurance, she's worried about the future, even with a rent subsidy from the city.

Moving into the same highrise are Sue Eddy, Kerry Leadbeater and their two children. Eddy and Leadbeater were told they - and they alone - could stay in the motel until Aug. 15.

Eddy and Leadbeater will pay \$1,750, plus hydro and insurance. Eddy, a dispatcher, said the city won't subsidize their rent.

"I only make \$2,000 a month," she said.

"We're going to be living poor. But at least we'll be out of the East Side."

Leadbeater hadn't seen the new place, but "as long as it's got four walls, no holes, we're fine. Because

anything's a step up from this."

She blinked as she looked inside her motel suite, where the ceiling near the door was patched with sagging bags and tape. "We won't use duct tape no more."

With eviction still looming for others back at East Side, however, Woodcock was convinced the city "dropped the ball."

The sheriff didn't show up last Friday. Instead, Gord Tanner, director of homelessness initiatives and prevention, said the city was willing to allow remaining tenants a few more days, provided they're out by the 15th.

Though the closure is "pretty anxiety-provoking," the city reserved rooms at another Kingston Road motel, so all tenants will get settled somewhere.

"There is no one here that we will see homeless," Tanner said.

By then, Batta was gone. A friend said he

found a new motel room.

Gary Crawford, the local councillor, said conditions at East Side are "deplorable," and "opened my eyes up a little bit more" to how individuals and families are forced to live in places not suitable for anyone.

It shows how important affordable housing is for Toronto, said Crawford.

Work to turn a former Comfort Inn next door into a transitional shelter for older men and women is expected to finish before the end of this year. "I'd love to get that motel taken down before the new residents move in," the councillor said.

### STORY BEHIND THE STORY

The City of Toronto finally completed the legal process to expropriate the East Side Motel, taking possession on Aug. 9. Knowing this, we wanted to see what would happen to East Side tenants.