

## Local

# City trying to deal with issue of illegal student rooming houses around U of M

By: [Aldo Santin](#)

Posted: 1:32 PM |

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City officials are trying to come to grips with problems posed by private homes illegally converted to post-secondary student housing.

Prompted by concern from residents near the University of Manitoba, the city's planning department prepared a detailed analysis of how other municipalities deal with problems associated with student housing.

The Fort Richmond residents had complained about a proliferation of illegal rooming houses sprouting up around the U of M campus, poorly maintained yards, parking issues, noise complaints and overcrowding conditions that breach fire codes and pose a safety threat.

"It's only a matter of time before someone, or maybe five or six people, die in a fire in one these homes," said St. Norbert Coun. Janice Lukes, whose ward encompasses the area surrounding the U of M campus.

Lukes said out-of-town landlords are buying single-family homes and illegally renting them to students. She said the problem has spread beyond the immediate neighbourhoods of Fort Richmond and University Heights, into neighbouring Waverley Heights, Kirkfield Park and Bridgewater Forest.

"Almost every street (in those neighbourhoods) has an illegal rooming house on it," Lukes said.

By law, only two unrelated people can live together in a home but Lukes said landlords are illegally renting out homes to as many as six to eight students.

Neighbours are annoyed because the rental properties are unkempt and there are problems with noisy parties. But Lukes said there are real safety concerns: lack of smoke and fire alarms, no fire extinguishers, inadequate number of exists; illegally converted space into bedrooms.

Lukes said the city's bylaw enforcement officers act on complaints but it's difficult to gain access to properties. She said officials evicted students from two illegal rooming houses this past spring.

The administrative report to Friday's property and development committee doesn't propose any solution and there is no recommendation for a next step beyond assessing the current situation.

Committee chairman Coun. John Orlikow said he hopes the committee can develop a plan on how to take the next steps to deal with the issue.

Lukes said as a first step, she will ask the committee to see how fire officials and bylaw officers can work more closely together

Other communities have tackled the problem, Lukes said, adding Winnipeg may have to devise special zoning regulations that recognize student housing but place limits on the number in each neighbourhood.

Lukes said she's planning an open house in September to present a range of options for residents to consider but added she won't impose a solution on them.