

## **TOO MANY TENANTS: COUNCILLOR WANTS TO CRACKDOWN ON OVERCROWDED HOUSING NEAR U OF M**

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*City councillor Janice Lukes stands in front of a property on Thatcher Drive off University Crescent in Winnipeg believed to house as many as 15 students on Thu., June 25, 2015.*

They're overcrowded, unsightly and putting students in danger.

That's how Coun. Janice Lukes (St. Norbert) sees the "horrific" illegal rooming houses popping up within single family homes around the University of Manitoba.

Lukes said there are more than 100 such homes, especially in the Fort Richmond and University Heights areas, that cram in far more student tenants than the two or three they can legally accommodate based on zoning and building codes. Meanwhile, many also fail to expand exits, add fire extinguishers or impose other improvements needed to keep these students safe, she said.

"If one of these homes burns down and six or eight students die in them, that would be horrible. There's not been a fire that I'm aware of but it's only a matter of time," said Lukes. "It's creating unsafe living conditions."

Lukes has planned a September open house to address the issue and plans to request a public service report on improving safety in the homes.

"We're working to take back our community," Lukes said.

Unfortunately, bylaw enforcement efforts don't appear to be the sole answer. Lukes notes one home has been shut down by the city several times, only to re-open with new tenants. And a sign was boldly posted at one home advertising "six rooms for rent," which appeared to be above the legal limit.

Lukes said the trend has been amplified in the last five to seven years, as original homeowners move out of houses built in the 1960s and 1970s to downsize and out-of-town landlords buy up the properties. Instead of moving in, those landlords then rent out the entire home to multiple students, while the sites grow increasingly neglected, Lukes said.

A city staff report headed to the city's property and development meeting on Friday notes many cities with educational institutions are addressing the same issue. The public services report suggests the city could add new customized zoning categories to meet student housing needs or enforce minimum separation distances between single-room rental units to avoid too many popping up in one area. A so-called "Town and Gown" committee of school, resident and municipality members could also be struck to devise solutions.

Coun. John Orlikow (River Heights-Fort Garry), the property committee's chair, said those solutions may be pursued. But he'd first prefer to see a report solely devoted to safety issues related to the rental units.

"There's horror stories out there about completely unsafe homes," said Orlikow. "We have to see if something is preventing our bylaw inspectors from ensuring these facilities are safe."