

# Joyce residents await outcome of city's effort to buy building

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Approximately two dozen residents of The Joyce Hotel are waiting to hear their fate along with the outcome of a deal between the city of Portland and the building's owner.

Earlier this month, the city made its second offer to purchase the building in an effort to salvage one of the last low-income housing options in downtown Portland. As of press time, the deal was still under review.

The nearly shuttered building is still occupied by a dwindling number of residents, despite the closure of hotel operations. The management company, Precision Property Management Corp, formally handed over the keys to owner DZ Real Estate on May 1.

The Joyce Hotel is one of the last independent, low-barrier housing options in the downtown core. It was a place for people who were homeless or with little income to get inside for the week. Its low-barrier approach and weekly rates meant residents often stayed there for many years, treating it as a housing alternative more than a hotel.

David Tacke, president of PPMC, said there were still approximately 20 people left in the building when he left last weekend.

"The problem is that a lot of these people

are not equipped, and they're reclusive," Tacke said. "Some people have been there since 2007 and hardly ever come out of their room. They pay rent timely or they have a payee."

A payee is a service that manages the finances – most often government subsidies for disabilities – for people who are incapable of doing so on their own.

Central City Concern, or CCC, has also been working to relocate several of the residents. In the past month, CCC placed 14 people from the Joyce into their own housing, and several others into another hotel while they work on permanent placements.

Sharon Fitzgerald, our Senior Director of Housing Recovery Support Services with CCC said they are also working on referrals for health care, and have delivered food items and clothing for folks who were in desperate need.

As of press time, the deal was still in negotiations, and Kurt Creager, director of the Portland Housing Bureau, would not specify the amount of the offer.

Earlier this year, the Portland Housing Bureau had proposed buying the building from Zilka for approximately \$5 million, with plans to transition management to a local social service provider and preserve the low-income units. That offer was only good

provided the tenants remained in the hotel, and PPMC would continue managing the facility at least in the short term.

The management of PPMC has been a sticking point with DZ Real Estate, and in March, DZ owner Dan Zilka pulled out of negotiations with the city. Residents were initially told they had until March 31 to vacate the building, but that time was extended through the end of April.

Zilka has repeatedly refused to speak to Street Roots about the building or its future.

While most of the Joyce residents have moved out, Len Smith still calls it home. He has lived there for three years.

Smith said the remaining tenants received a letter at the start of March stating that they need not bother paying for their rooms. The front desk is manned, but no one can enter or leave without showing identification, he said. Smith was speaking outside the front door, waiting on the front desk attendant to return in order to enter. Tenants have also been told they are not allowed any guests, he said.

Smith said he and the other tenants are waiting on more information about their future, whether they can stay or will have to leave. They were told the owners went on vacation, Smith said.

"Should we be saving money? Should we get ready to pay rent? Should we be getting

ready to move?" Smith said. "We don't know what's going on."

Smith, who has lived in Portland all his life, said many of the residents who remain are incredibly vulnerable.

"This has been a home for a lot of people," Smith said. "They can't do this out here," he said, pointing at the sidewalk. "There are people who are not going to leave their room because they are too scared."

"Why are they doing this now?" Smith asked. "There are enough homeless people on the streets already."

If the deal goes through, the city could be looking at about \$12 million to bring it into shape, according to Creager. The building does not have a functioning elevator, it has water penetration on the upper floors due to a failed roof, and it needs a seismic retrofit.

Actually, several buildings in the city's portfolio of low-income housing need seismic upgrades, which means temporarily moving residents out to retrofit the structures. Creager said they hope to use the upgraded Joyce as relocation housing for residents while similar reinforcements are made to other buildings. The first floor would be repurposed for commercial tenants.

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