

Ottawa

City urged to hire more inspectors to catch 'construction horror stories'

No qualified inspectors to recruit, city says

[Kate Porter](#) · CBC News · Posted: Nov 25, 2021 2:28 PM ET | Last Updated: November 25, 2021



An infill development is built in Ottawa's desirable Westboro neighbourhood in May 2021. (Kate Porter/CBC)

Residents are calling on the City of Ottawa to hire more building inspectors so neighbours don't have to endure what one called "construction horror stories" next door, but staff say there simply aren't any qualified experts to recruit.

On Wednesday, Cheryl Parrott of the Hintonburg Community Association appeared before the city's planning committee, which oversees building code services.

She showed one photo of a neighbour's driveway that had been dug away during excavation work next door and had construction fencing sitting on it. Another neighbour had rainwater draining onto their property because the new building covers most of the lot, leaving nowhere else for the water to go.

Why should a neighbour have to hire a structural engineer when the city's allowed a developer to undercut their property? - *Cheryl Parrott, Hintonburg Community Association*

"Why should a neighbour have to hire a structural engineer when the city's allowed a developer to undercut their property?" asked Parrott. "Why should a neighbour have to fight so hard to have the city weigh in on potential building code disasters with weekly emails and phone calls for months and months?"

Councillors agreed it was unacceptable.

"In the last year and a half, things seem to have gotten much, much worse," said Kitchissippi Coun. Jeff Leiper, who demanded quicker response when bad builders cause problems.

The planning committee was discussing its portion of the City of Ottawa's draft 2022 budget, which includes \$29 million in operating costs for the building code services branch.

City has 17 inspector vacancies

"The troublemakers out there ... are troubling to the department as well," said Steve Willis, general manager of planning, infrastructure and economic development.

It's not a question of adding money to the city's budget, said Willis, because building code inspectors are paid for through permit fees, not taxes.

Instead, the problem is a long-standing one: The city simply can't find new inspectors to recruit.

The city has worked with Algonquin College to train new inspectors, but at present has 17 vacant positions it hopes to fill soon.

For now, Ottawa has 64 staff assigned to carry out inspections and three dedicated to complicated enforcement cases. They do good work but are "stretched thin," said Willis.

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- [Councillor raises new home building code concerns amid inspector shortage](#)

Willis also clarified that inspectors look only at buildings and not their grading, but the new official plan will give them more powers related to storm water.

The city has been seeing more issues from an increase in infill projects because those foundations are dug close to the lot line, said Willis. The city often asks for stamped engineering plans that might require builders to shore up adjacent properties, he said.

The law doesn't allow the municipality to charge damage deposits or deal with such civil matters such as encroachment onto neighbouring properties, which Willis agreed is frustrating.

Surge in building applications

The whole branch has a "very high workload," Willis said.

So far this year, the city has already received 11,000 planning applications, which are reviewed by 34 staff. Some applications are just for a deck, but others are for complicated highrise buildings, said chief building official John Buck.

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- [Boom in building permits last year sets city record](#)

Coun. Riley Brockington, who said he frequently hears from small builders about the length of time it takes to process a permit, asked if the city is allocating enough money to the task.

Willis said the 2022 budget includes an extra seven temporary employees to deal with the surge in applications.

The planning committee's portion of the city budget rises to council on Dec. 8.