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Zahedi: Closing of Brunswick unnecessary

In a Thursday morning interview with *NewsLanc*, Hamid Zahedi, managing partner for the Hotel Brunswick, expressed frustration with the Fire Bureau's decision Wednesday to close the hotel due to an as-yet-unspecified list of code violations.

Zahedi claimed that the decision was made without any attempt to negotiate a practical solution to uphold safety while allowing the hotel to maintain operation: "*It is reasonable* [to say,] 'I want somebody here 24 hours a day, awake, doing their rounds.'"

"Even if you have no alarm, ... there are ways around it." Zahedi suggested the posting of guards until repairs could be made. He confirmed that the fire suppression (sprinkler) system was operational throughout the hotel.

Before Wednesday's inspection, the last Zahedi had heard about a June 30 deadline for installing a new alarm system was in a letter dated May 6. Since that time, he was told by one of his contractors that the deadline had been extended until September—yet, even with the "new" deadline, more staff would be needed to complete the massive installation.

City code officials visited about once each week throughout the renovation process; however, Zahedi said, those visits were very brief, often only to confirm that contractors were at work on a new system. Wednesday, about six inspectors arrived early in the day, according to Zahedi, and spent around an hour assessing the facility.

The Fire Bureau then notified Zahedi that the facility would have to be evacuated immediately and closed for business. The hotel also had to close its doors to two busloads of reserved visitors. Apart from the fire alarm malfunction, Zahedi was provided with no additional details as to what was deemed hazardous. The full list of cited hazards will be provided to Zahedi in a letter from the Fire Bureau on Thursday.

On Wednesday, Zahedi appealed to the City to intervene: "*I put a few calls into the City, but my calls were not answered. Then I went in person to City Hall. I met with* [Economic Development & Neighborhood Revitalization Director] *Randy Patterson, and he said that it was out of his hands.*"

The Hotel Brunswick has contracted its alarm system supervision to Yarnell Security Systems, a reputable local business with over 37 years of experience in the field: "*I'm not a technical person,*" Zahedi said, "*and if there's something not right, we expect them to tell us.*" Thursday, Yarnell had workers assessing the existing alarm system to determine what caused the malfunction.

Still uncertain as to the full extent of the Fire Bureau's citations, Zahedi questioned the rationale behind Wednesday's radical actions: "*I think the City should have made sure that we had enough time to do this. This was not a detrimental thing, it wasn't a matter of life and death. If it was, why wasn't this place closed way back?*"

Fire Bureau's explanation of Brunswick closing

Notes from **NewsLanc**'s Cliff Lewis's Thursday interview with Fire Marshal, Lt. Thomas Paul, who oversaw Wednesday's inspection and subsequent closing of the Brunswick Hotel:

- According to Paul, in the course of projects like the Brunswick's renovation and alarm system upgrade, it is customary for a code official/inspector to visit the site as often as once each week. He said that Wednesday's inspection was especially thorough because of the passed deadline. The visit was, essentially, an attempt to determine whether the existing system could serve as a sufficient "band-aid" until the required system could be installed. And, in the course of this inspection, a number of unrelated problems were discovered.
- Paul indicated that the fire alarm system was not the sole citation that led to closing the hotel. In fact, according to Paul, most of the "life safety concerns" were discovered in the last 24 hours. As Paul puts it, "the whole was equal to the sum of its parts"
- Because the Brunswick is privately owned, Paul did not want to dispense detailed information regarding the cited hazards. He suggested **NewsLanc** speak with Zahedi to gather this information.
- Paul mentioned that one major problem had to do with the fire-resistance of some of the 9-story building's vertical shafts (elevators, stairwells, laundry shoots)
- Paul asserted that the passing of the June 30—the last of many deadlines—was not the sole reason for closing the hotel. If that had been the only issue, Paul said, the Bureau most likely would have simply issued a citation.
- Paul maintained that the problems discovered on Wednesday were sufficient to close the hotel. Had the Fire Bureau known about these issues sooner, Paul said, the hotel would have been immediately closed, as it was on Wednesday.

[NASTY] LETTER: "Yes Yes. Isn't that handy? Why not shut down the PSP's competition! Are they trying to say this all of a sudden was a problem? Must be nice to have friends in power, isn't it, Dale?"

Proposed condos vital for downtown

The City of Lancaster has formerly approved a mixed-use mid-rise building for a corner of North Queen and East Chestnut Streets consisting of an expansion to the bus terminal, the relocated art museum, a parking garage and 38 luxury condominium apartments.

It is arguable that 38 condo units sold to affluent suburbanites will generate as much buying power downtown as the Marriott Hotel!

But even more importantly, bringing the affluent to downtown adds an influential voice and

powerful constituency for intelligent downtown improvements.

When suburban "empty nesters" sell their homes for \$500,000 to \$750,000 and move downtown, younger suburbanites will envision joining their elders at a later date and view the city and suburbs more holistically. (It no longer will be the inner city "them" and the suburban "us"!)

Lastly, there will likely be far fewer children to educate per assessment dollar, a boon for the School District of Lancaster.

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