

Non-profit ousted from Downtown Eastside hotels

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CBC News has learned a non-profit society that has been repairing two rundown Downtown Eastside rooming houses is being evicted by the landlord.

Julie Roberts of the Community Builders Group said they have spent tens of thousands of dollars upgrading the Wonder and Palace hotels over the past four months.

"Repairing, fixing, making the buildings habitable and dealing with severe rat and pest infestations, bed bugs and the like," Roberts said.

The hotels are owned by [George Wolsey](#), who has battled with the city for years over building code violations. In recent months he ran into serious financial problems and the buildings faced foreclosure.

In September, Wolsey agreed to hand over operations of the hotels to the Community Builders Group, a local non-profit organization.

Now, Roberts says, landlord George Wolsey has broken his contract with them to manage the two hotels.

"He has contacted the ministry that issues the rent cheques to the tenants and has told them that his contract with Community Builders is over," Roberts said. "And he has gotten a hold of the rent revenue and has, in essence, broken our contracts."

Douglas King, a lawyer with the Pivot Legal society, is worried.

"It's a huge step backwards," he said. "I think really brings into question if the gains that we have achieved in those two buildings over the past six months are going to be holding there in the long term."

Roberts said the landlord expects Community Builders Group to be gone by Dec. 1.

She said the 71 tenants at the Wonder and Palace hotels are now afraid they will be evicted or have their rents raised dramatically.

"You know, [charging] \$700 for rooms that we were charging \$375 for," she said.

But a lawyer representing the owner told the CBC the residents would not be evicted or have their rents increased, on Tuesday morning.

Meanwhile Both Roberts and King are calling on the city to step up to the plate with a court order to stop the Community Builders Groups from being evicted.

With files from the CBC's Terry Donnelly