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OUR OPINION

City should be prepared to ensure tenants' comfort

The long-suffering tenants of the infamous Cheyenne Avenue apartment buildings should not have to put up with health- and comfort-defying conditions.

As if earlier cockroach infestations and sewer backups were not enough, the tenants of buildings at 95 and 105 Cheyenne could now have their utilities cut off by the PUC next week. That's because owner Elijah Elieff is about \$8,100 behind on his bills.

These two buildings have been a continuous headache for property and health inspectors for years because of cock roaches, faulty plumbing, damaged walls, and a reluctance of Elieff to correct these and other problems. Unfortunately, it is the tenants who suffer.

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It is unfortunate that a plan to have the buildings torn down, along with two others in the area, to make way for a new co-op housing project was turned down last summer by the Ontario ministry of housing. Hopefully, a revised proposal to extensively renovate the existing buildings that is now before the ministry will have a better fate.

In the meantime, residents there should not be made to suffer — particularly with winter approaching.

Tenants can pay unpaid utility bills in such circumstances and deduct the cost from their rent, but such a procedure involving many recent arrivals to the country could prove cumbersome.

The city should step in and pay the utility bills if necessary by the Dec. 14 deadline, and then add the amount to Elieff's property tax bill. The city has the legal authority to seize and sell the buildings if the tax bill is not eventually paid, and it should be prepared to do so.

Then again, perhaps the city could encourage the PUC to take retaliatory action by cutting off service to the landlord's home until he's paid his bills. Winter is approaching — for tenants and landlords alike.