

# Report to London City Council

## Property Standards By-Law CP-16

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*In Association with*  
LIFE\*SPIN

Community Engaged Learning ~ Report to Council  
Submitted May 17, 2021

Dear Members of Council

As part of our Sociology of Deviance course at Western University, we collaborated on a law review project, with LIFE\*SPIN, as part of our Community Engaged Learning. This report is our submission to City Council regarding By-Law CP-16. We thank you for the opportunity to provide London's City Council our recommendations on the Property Standards By-Law.

LIFE\*SPIN is a local organization that serves low-income families in London Ontario and is an advocate for their struggles. Low-income families are one of the marginalized groups in London and their voices are not heard and their rights are not upheld. On February 8<sup>th</sup>, 2021, we launched our housing survey to over 300 of LIFE\*SPIN'S clients inquiring about their housing conditions. The survey was conducted into two parts. One, for those living in low-income housing. The other, for anyone to submit the address and photos of an abandoned property. This report reflects the submissions made in regards to derelict housing – homes that are in violation of property standards. The survey was open for responses for a period of one month and we received an overwhelming number of responses. With the help of our survey many low-income families were able to identify issues with their homes that would enable us to report to you. In one way or another, their living conditions were often in a state of infraction of by-law C-16 and yet changes to the By-Law being proposed, will create no change for these families. After looking at the data presented by London residents, we submit that we concur with LIFE\*SPIN's report to Council, dated March 2, 2021.

Property standards and its related by-laws are an essential part of both municipal and provincial legislation. These aforementioned by-laws regulate property maintenance and occupancy standards, thus ensuring public safety in or around existing buildings and vacant land. Such standards intend to outline the reasonable care and upkeep, as is a responsibility of the respective owner. This is especially important as it relates to tenants, particularly those who are at risk, due to income barriers. Safety risks resulting from various factors, including both ignorance and disregard by many landlords who neglect to maintain suitable living conditions. Thus, those who rent are often required to address these issues either independently or through a property standards complaint. Because of this, it is immensely evident how a lack of enforcement may negatively affect the health and wellbeing of an already at-risk population.

Whilst analyzing various data sets, certain patterns prevailed. These patterns tend to provide a more in-depth understanding towards systemic issues that by-law revisions should consider. The data submitted through the 2021 property survey, was considerably uniform across the city of London, with few substantial inconsistencies. With that being said, citizens identified a higher concentration of vacant buildings throughout both south and south east London, relative to that of the rest of the city. Disenfranchised neighbourhoods often lack the energy and resources to demand improvements. However, the presence of this discernible uniformity suggests the issue of unenforced property standards is immensely prevalent across London, rather than being condensed to individual neighborhoods.

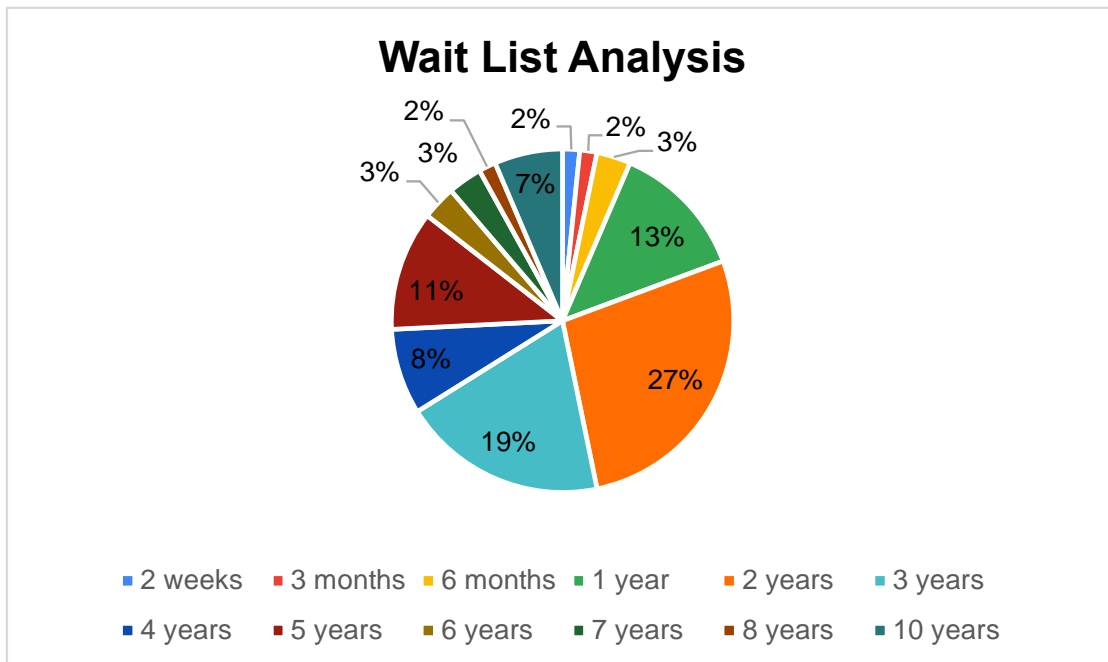
Currently, requests for inspections, made on clearly derelict properties, are met with an automated message: “Please send your Landlord or Property Manager a dated letter or email outlining the repairs that need to be conducted at your rental property and retain a copy for your own records”. Denying an accessible and fair reporting and appeal process for those tenants who are living in substandard conditions, denies tenant rights and discourages community efforts at “making living conditions suitable”. The system for reporting properties in contravention of the Property Standards By-Law needs to be revised.

In particular, many tenants feel they have no choice but to live in substandard conditions, as a result of fear of losing their housing if they report the property owner’s violations. However, if a report is filed by a tenant and a property owner requests an appeal, it would be prudent to send an officer to do a thorough inspection of the property. This would remove some of the burden on the tenant to become the single party responsible for enforcement.

Furthermore, neighbours living next to these properties and surrounding community workers/organizers, social assistance workers, and CAS workers should also be able to submit requests for inspection when they are aware the residents are living in unsafe conditions.

**Who needs property standards to be enforced?**

There are a few points that we want to highlight and emphasize in this report. First and most importantly it is *human dignity*. From the responses we have received so far almost 14% are on the wait list for subsidizing housing. The Property Standards will have no affect if there is not serious enforcement. When we asked in the survey about subsidizing housing almost 14% of respondents were wait listed. However, the wait list seems to have a very common theme. Most the respondents have been on the wait list for 2-3 years, others up to 10 years. 7% of those on the wait list have been on there for 10 years, that is more than those on there for a few weeks or even months. It is clear that their needs are not being met and they have been ignored for a long period of time. Others have it worse, a few of the respondents reported that they were taken off the list without knowing why. Others do not know if they should be on the list, which goes to show the minimal information that is provided to low-income communities to insure they have proper living conditions.



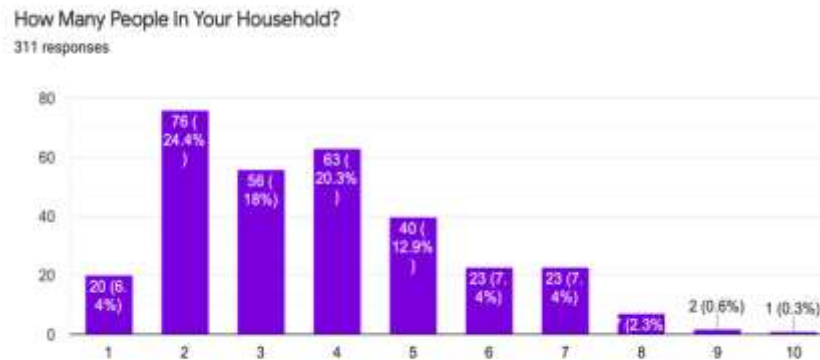
## The Survey

The survey was conducted for a one-month period. We posted the survey on LIFE\*SPIN's social media accounts and the London Free Press published the link to the survey as well. There were 310 surveys completed by self-identified respondents.

- 54 households did not have a working Smoke Detector outside each their bedrooms
- 78 households have leaking/dripping taps, or does their toilet continuously fills
- 59 households have water leaks in their ceilings
- 38 households have broken windows
- 117 households have flooring that is not in good repair
- 102 households have outlets or lighting that does not work
- 91 households have appliances that are broken
- 130 households have other repairs needed. We will provide quotes from the surveys at the end of our submission, describing some of these issues.

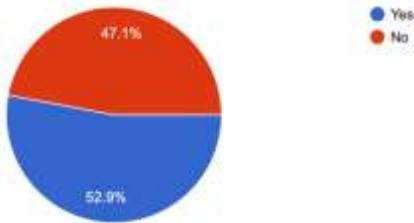
Results of the survey show that more than 80% of the households referenced maintenance issues ((249 of the 310). Furthermore, 55% of the households referenced multiple issues (171 of the 310).

## Screenshots from the survey-

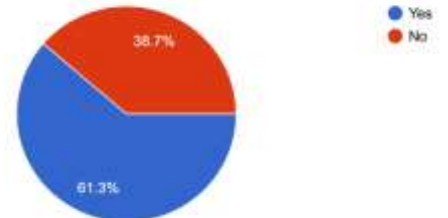


We also identified how many residents lived in each household, and how many bedrooms were available in the home. Almost 10% of the households had more than 2 people sharing a room.

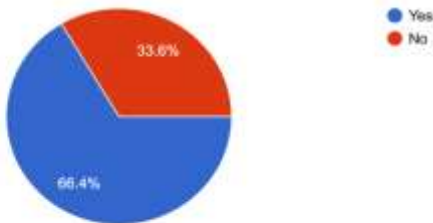
Do you have a working Carbon Monoxide Detector in your home?  
306 responses



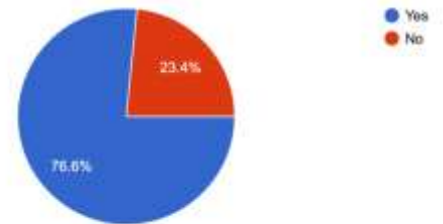
Is your flooring in good repair?  
305 responses



Do all of your outlets and lights work?  
307 responses

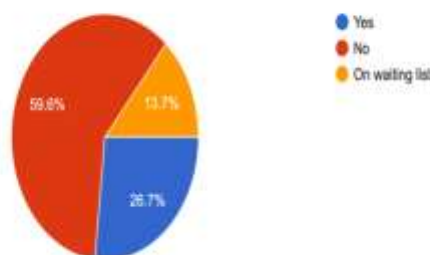


Have you notified your landlord of the repairs needed?  
299 responses



It is important to look at the relationship between household members and the issues they have in their homes. The majority of renters are living in private-market dwellings. Many are missing the basic requirements in every home. Carbon monoxide detectors are a necessity for the safety of these families and to alert them of the unknown. Working outlets, proper flooring and adequate plumbing are also things that are a need not a want. The landlords of these derelict homes are in clear violation of by-law C-16 and they are placing these families' lives in danger by ignoring their proper needs and rights.

Do you live in subsidized housing?  
307 responses



It is also important to note that almost 77% of respondents have notified their landlords of any issues that need to be fixed and yet they have not been repaired. It is not about licensed repair needs, like electrical and plumbing, Basic repairs to flooring can also prevent serious injuries. A few reported being injured by broken tiles and are afraid for their children. Unsafe conditions also include mold, infestations, walls and windows that are leaking or missing screens. These all go against any human right and many safety requirements. People are afraid that their bathrooms or ceilings might fall on them due to water leakage. Any repairs that were done, were done improperly and half hearted. Landlords are now hiding behind the pandemic and are using it as an excuse to ignore any repairs that are required of them. However, tradespeople are still working across the city, so this is not a valid excuse for any repairs needed.

*A few of our respondents sent pictures of their homes showing us the conditions they are living in.*



According to the proposed changes to by-law C-16 the landlord will be fined if they do not meet the standards. However, as noted above and from the survey many of the landlords seem to ignore their tenants' requests and the by-law enforcement office is not conducting actual inspections. Inspections are needed Pre and Post any enforcement orders, to ensure that all of the issues found in home inspections are addressed.

The respondents are living in unfit homes and unfit environments and no actions have been taken to change that. The pandemic has brought on a huge strain to many of the low-income families, requiring them to also stay at home in these unsafe properties. The City needs to consider them important enough to keep them healthy and secure. No one should have to worry about getting cuts on their feet from broken tiles or fear that their ceilings may fall on them.

## Our Asks

***Enforcing the laws*** will help close up that inequality gap that many families are living in. We would also like to reiterate LIFE\*SPIN's point from their submission of March 2<sup>nd</sup>, that if the landlord or property owner does not do the repairs, the city needs to take serious actions to do so. If the repairs cannot be done, we ask the city to create different measures to move and protect the tenants into more secure housing.

Second thing we would like to bring up is ***social equity and equality***. Low-income tenants do not receive the proper level of attention for their rights. We are requesting that you consider the creation of an Affordable Housing policy that will protect the tenants and create a safe environment for them. There seems to be a lack of acknowledgment that tenants will never receive a copy of an appeal for a Property Standards Order. There needs to be a way for them to receive the proper assistance to participate in a Hearing process, without a charge. These are low-income families who are already living in unfit environments and do not need added pressure on them. While tenants may be able to access the Housing Tribunal, they need to demonstrate that they have had the City confirm that the property does not meet the property standards.

The system for reporting violations and getting action on the violations does not currently work at all. The proposed by-law revisions do not implement a process of changing the conditions they are living in.



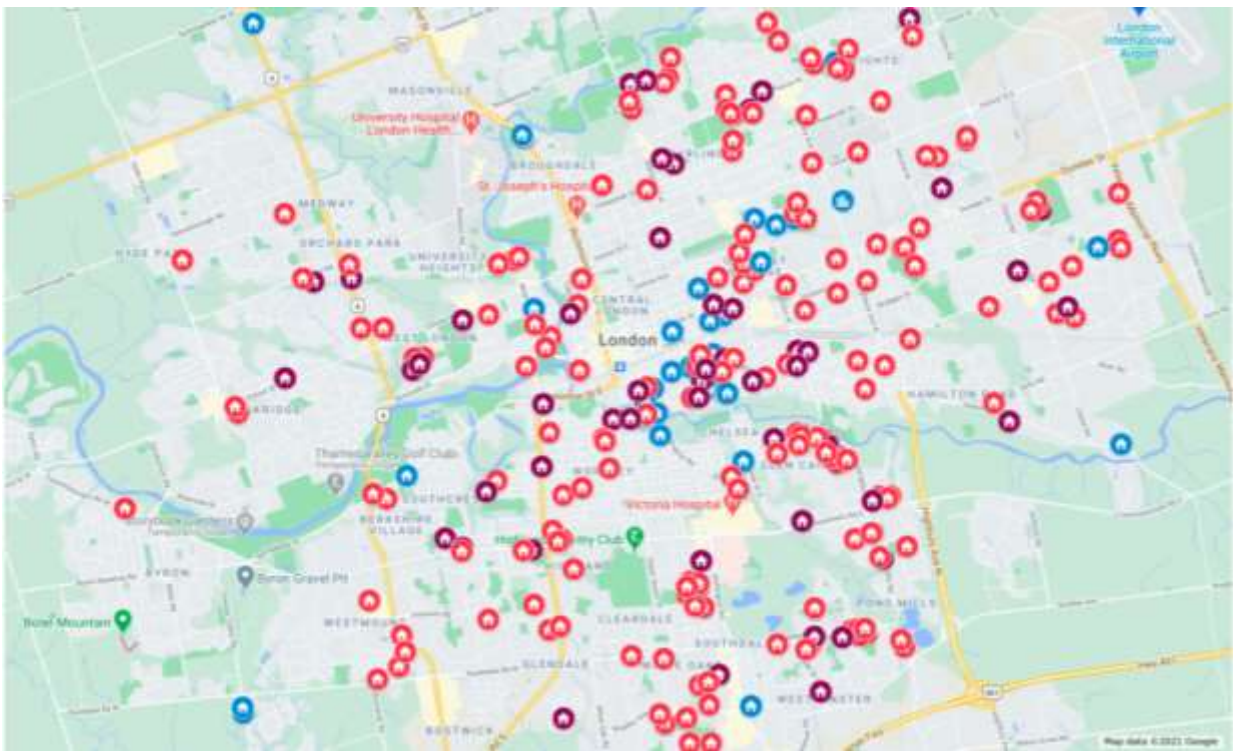
***Rebuilding Trust*** with our community can start with inspections of properties already identified as potentially not meeting the existing or proposed By-Law CP-16. To that end, we are providing a starting point. We are requesting that these properties be inspected for their conformity to our community standards.

## Where is vacant and derelict housing in London?

We created a mapping tools where citizens of London could post addresses that they felt needed to be inspected by the City of London By-Law Enforcement. The map covers properties identified for a one-month period.

The mapping allowed Londoners to identify vacant and derelict houses located here in London Ontario. Our group has added over 300 addresses, of which over 250 are homes in need of inspections and repairs. The blue icons represent vacant properties not secured according to vacant property standards. The red icons indicate properties that Londoners felt were in need of property standards inspections. The burgundy icons represent properties where the violations to property standards and requests for repairs were confirmed as reported to their landlords.

This shows the extent of the problem and the dire need for action and change. We are requesting that the City begin to enforce these by-laws and have regular check-ups on the derelict houses. We respectfully ask that the council takes serious strategies to be put in place, so people are held accountable, and tenants begin to feel safe once again.



**This map indicates properties that citizens have identified for potential bylaw infractions. We are requesting that the city inspect these properties.**

The results of the mapping were posted as of March 2, 2021 and can be viewed at [https://www.google.com/maps/d/u/2/edit?hl=en&mid=1G5friNkco\\_AIYSds-ra9AclNyu0ahT\\_1&ll=42.97665083706703%2C-81.26252975000001&z=11](https://www.google.com/maps/d/u/2/edit?hl=en&mid=1G5friNkco_AIYSds-ra9AclNyu0ahT_1&ll=42.97665083706703%2C-81.26252975000001&z=11)



## Quotes from the survey

“if you turn the oven and tv on at the same time, the circuit in the whole apartment blows”

“The cupboards in the kitchen are broken, the bathroom is full of black mold, there is garbage in the back of the apartment all the time, the apartment is always cold, the ceiling in the one bedroom collapsed, the bathroom ceiling leaks”

“Holes in my walls, all of the railings fell off of the wall, doors missing, floor needs to be fixed”

“Cracks in walls, ceiling damaged, light fixture hanging from ceiling”

“Bathroom -water leaks through to living room through the ceiling”

“Screens on front and back doors, kitchen sink backs up regularly and pipe underneath sometimes leaks/falls off”

“foundation broken, due to a tree falling through the window and it’s constantly leaking. Mold everywhere. No hot water working.”

“One room isn't insulated properly, useless in the winter time. Too cold to sleep in.”

“Bathroom is ukered - need tub surround redone and fully brought up to code. It’s linoleum over top of some mold infested crap. Kitchen counter and all taps in the house leak and need replacement”

“Leak in second bedroom has been there since I've been here and they were aware of it then, 15 years ago, it's been documented on my yearly inspections, it's been looked at by our maintenance guy last year and still not fixed. Covid is now blamed for inside work, but the leak is from outside! Hole can be plugged yet 15 years! And nothing”

“Flooring parka is falling apart. Tiles are broken and I sliced my foot open. I have covered them in tape now to protect my kid’s feet. Ceiling in bathroom leaks when it storms.”

“Bedroom window broken, living room carpet is old and my kids get sick often. Back door is loose from the hinges and has been months like that. The rental office doesn't do anything about it. A lot of repairs need to be done. I been living here since 2004.”

“I have been waiting for a fridge for a week. The ceilings leak in three different parts of the home, my windows don't open upstairs and the balcony is unsafe”

“Have had a hole in the ceiling in my kitchen for about 2 years now and has been patched up once, but happened again, about a year ago now, and they still haven't come to fix it. I'm afraid the bathroom is going to come through the kitchen ceiling eventually, with all the water damage there is.”

“Bathroom paint peeling BAD and mould, cupboard doors in kitchen are broken and off”

“Missing bathroom door, some of the door don't close properly, both front and side door are not sealed properly and front door isn't installed properly, all windows are not sealed properly, flooring in the kitchen and bathroom on the main floor are loose and broken, towel racks are missing, towel rack in the main bathroom fell off the wall because it will put on with doubled-sided tape, the kitchenette sink taps don't work right-water comes out slow, the place wasn't clean or painted and we were forced to take it as is, the hot water tank isn't hooked up right and goes against the fire code: it's plugged into a extension cord, one of the plugs in the furnace room has to be plugged into another plug to work, the floors were full of cockroaches bodies because they just sprayed and now they are coming back again, and a lot of rats outside. I have brought all this to my landlord's attention through email and phone call and haven't heard from them about any maintenance work being done, nor any spraying being done. My parents and I are paying too much rent for all these problem. All they worried about is getting the rent from the tenants and they don't do any plowing in the winter”

“Foundation is slowly falling apart, can move walls, paint chipping or peeling, was told to get my own contractor”

“Kitchen wall and ceiling is cracked open, swollen and running water from multiple bulges and leaks. Hallway wall in stairwell is the same”

“Doors need fixing, outlets need to be covered. Need a smoke detected put in. I did need bathroom door fixed but a neighbour did it for me. Need a new fridge and stove. They are from the 70s and barely hanging on and oven does not close all the way so food doesn't cook properly. My apartment is freezing and I cannot afford the extra heat needed to keep up warm, so me and my 3-year-old son live on the couch with blankets and barely ever move from under them.”

“Major bug issues, filth and minimal upkeep in common areas, stairwells usually have urine”

“Holes in walls, broken doors, gigantic hole and mold in closet, gigantic hole in son's closet”

“Need electric heating baseboards replaced; only 2 are working, plumbing and electrical needs updating”

“I have a lot that I have put in requests and housing hasn't done the work (for over 6 years). I have a cracking foundation that is making my rental unstable, to the point where the walls are separating from the floor. I have floors separating from the wall and bending so that it's like walking up a hill. I have a broken fan in my bathroom. I have my bathroom tub that has been personally scrubbed, but the black mold keeps coming back from behind the tiles on the wall. I have two broken cupboards. My floors aren't safe, to the point where you see the wood panels they laid down and there are nails. A lot of electrical problems as well. Plus, we have mice.”