



THE LAW SCHOOL
CLINICAL LAW CENTER

Press release concerning the living conditions at the Hoffman Hotel

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NOTRE DAME LAW CLINIC PRESS RELEASE:

I. Introduction

The Notre Dame Law School Eviction Clinic has recently investigated the living conditions at the Hoffman Hotel, located at 120 W LaSalle Street, South Bend, IN 46601. This press release is meant to share the findings of our investigation. The Eviction Clinic commonly provides pro bono legal services for members of the nearby community. The Eviction Clinic is led by Professor David Pruitt and staffed by certified legal interns, including Colton Barta and Andrew Coffey, who spearheaded this investigation. We hope that sharing what we saw at Hoffman Hotel and what we have heard from residents there will lead to further investigations and published pieces that report on what the poorest and most vulnerable members of the public have to endure. We at the Eviction Clinic welcome any questions or requests regarding our investigation. We hope that management at Hoffman Hotel takes action to properly maintain the residence and give their tenants the respect they deserve.

The Hoffman Hotel Apartments, once an attractive living space that provided affordable housing to local artists in the South Bend community, now sits at the heart of the city in disrepair, creating serious issues for the health and well-being of its tenants. Built in 1930, the 12-story brick building houses 21 small apartments and 150 hotel rooms. In 1985, the building was listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Unfortunately, the building's rich cultural history is now overshadowed by unsanitary living conditions, massive safety concerns, and exorbitant electric bills for tenants.

II. History

The Hoffman Hotel was built in 1930, designed by South Bend local, Willard M. Ellwood.¹ At the time of building, the Hotel's cross streets, La Salle Ave and Michigan Street, were the location for three different railroad stops, placing Hoffman at the center of South Bend's economic heart.²

More than 80 years later, the Hoffman Hotel was revamped by owner Bill Hollingsworth into "artist housing", though the renovation was partially or entirely funded by the taxpayer.³ Previous reporting suggest that Hollingsworth and his company, Equal Development LLC, has received close to five million dollars in tax credits and abatements through federal and state

¹ *Building South Bend: Past, Present, and Future*, University of Notre Dame (Last updated 2026), <https://buildingsouthbend.nd.edu/properties/nd-sb-00228/>

² *Id.*

³ Kevin Allen, *Hoffman Hotel in South Bend Now Home to Artist*, South Bend Tribune (Apr. 14, 2016), <https://www.southbendtribune.com/story/business/2016/04/14/hoffman-hotel-in-south-bend-now-home-to-artists/117219258/>.

programs and grants.⁴ Hoffman Hotel’s application for federal housing tax credits included an “artist preference” component, meaning that if two potential tenants applied to live at Hoffman, and both met the requirements for income set forth by the property, an artist would win out over a non-artist.⁵ A resident at Hoffman Hotel reported that before 2020, Hoffman Hotel offered tenants programs and resources meant to encourage them in their artistic endeavors. These benefits included providing tenants with painting canvases, paint brushes, check-in appointments with management to discuss projects, and property-sponsored outings to museums and local events. All of those programs and resources are no longer available to the people who live at Hoffman, despite still being advertised online. Additionally, there has been no on-site management since 2020. According to residents, visits by maintenance or property managers are infrequent. To contact management, residents must call Prairie Apartments, which are also owned by Equal Development LLC.

The conditions at the Hoffman Hotel have gradually but dramatically worsened over time. The property is currently owned by Hoffman Hotel Apartments Housing Partners LP.⁶ That Limited Partnership shares the same address as Equal Development LLC.⁷ While the conditions at Hoffman Hotel continue to deteriorate, Equal Development LLC is hard at work with a construction project in Kentucky, also paid for with 15 million dollars of taxpayer money.⁸

III. Our Investigation

The Notre Dame Law Clinic first became aware of the conditions at Hoffman through a source (Mx. Doe) who wishes to remain unnamed due to fear of retaliation from property management. Mx. Doe met with the Notre Dame Law Clinic to discuss the living conditions at the property. After that initial meeting, Colton Barta and Andrew Coffey visited Hoffman to inspect the property and collect pictures in early February of 2026. The following descriptions covering areas of concern at the Hoffman Hotel and the accompanying photos were sourced and collected both by Mx. Doe, Mr. Barta, and Mr. Coffey.

⁴ *Id.*

⁵ *Id.*

⁶ You are able to check the property records here -

<http://maps.macog.com/Html5Viewer/Index.html?configBase=http://maps.macog.com/Geocortex/Essentials/Ess443/REST/sites/MobileProperty/viewers/MobileProperty/virtualdirectory/Resources/Config/Default>

⁷ The bottom of Equal Development’s contact us page list their address at the bottom -

<https://equaldevelopment.com/contact-us>

⁸ Vince Tweddell, *The Dream Moves to Reality*, *The Hendersonian*, (Mar. 1, 2025),

<https://the-hendersonian.com/the-dream-is-becoming-reality/>.

A. Safety Concerns

i. Building Access and Security

There is evidence to suggest that the common spaces at the Hoffman Hotel have been utilized as a space for non-residents to use illegal drugs. Below is a picture showing what seems to be a spoon and a hot pot of some kind that would be used to heat heroin before injection.



The image above was taken in the property's music room, a once soundproof room where musicians were free to practice their craft. Directly outside the music room, there were dried marks of an orange colored substance that appeared to be, and smelled like vomit. The music room has since been locked, but a small mattress and crumbs of animal crackers were found outside.







Not far from the music room, a stray insulin needle was found. In South Bend, it is common for drug users to repurpose medical needles for drug use.⁹



Hoffman's former lounge area, where residents could relax, paint, and socialize with other tenants, smelled of marijuana. The bathroom that directly leads to the lounge area is pictured below. Pieces of ash are located on the sink and on the table located directly next to it. There are pieces of rolling paper and ash in the toilet.







Aside from illegal drug use, there are concerns that non-residents have been able to access the building and sleep in the common areas. The Clinic has heard from residents of Hoffman that the former red light room, where photographers could develop their pictures, was seen with a mattress in it. The main door for the photography room is missing its handle. Food packaging and a cigar wrapper were found on the floor close to the mattress set on a metal mattress frame. Curiously, there was another metal frame located in the room directly outside the red light room. The photography room has since been locked.





Dirty clothes, empty water bottles, used napkins, torn wrappers, and ashed cigarettes were found at the top of one of the stairwells.





The Business Center, which once provided a set of computers that residents could use free of charge, is now full of garbage, including a propane tank that may have been used by a non-resident to heat the room while sleeping there.

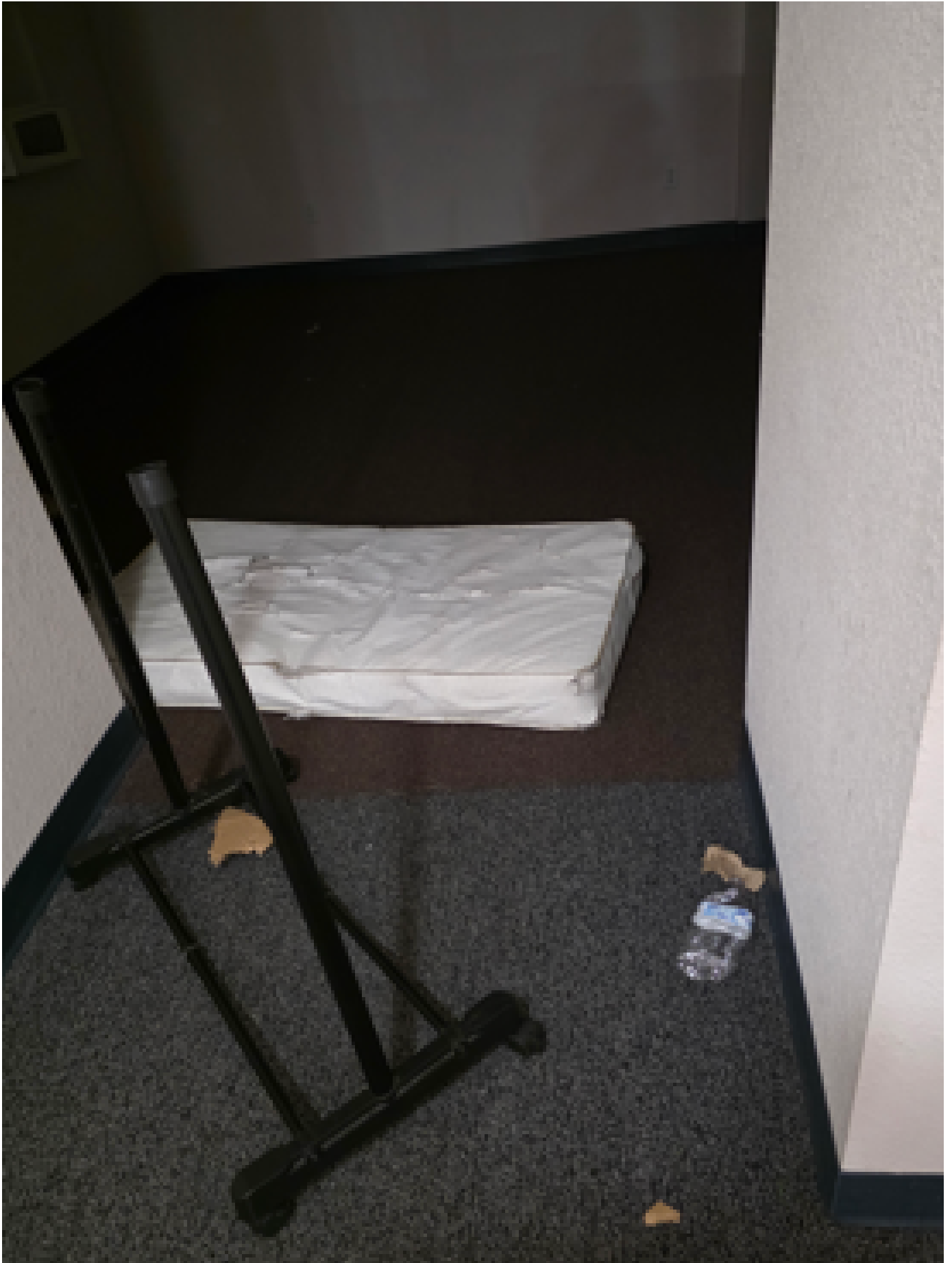






In the former fitness room, it appears that the window unit heating the room has been tampered with. There was a mini-mattress on the ground, and on the windowsill, a microwave was found next to a dish holding what seemed to be an unfinished and rotting Pop-Tart.







Structural Integrity and Proper Maintenance

a. Ceilings and Walls

Many common areas in the Hoffman Hotel appear to suffer from construction defects or warrant massive, urgent repairs. One of the clearest examples of this is the previously mentioned music room, where photographs of drug paraphernalia were taken. In the picture directly below, the metal bar supporting the ceiling is bending towards the ground, suggesting that it has been permanently damaged. Tenants surmised that non-residents use the exposed ceilings to store their goods. The music room has since been locked.







In the stairwells, there are clear signs of water damage to the walls. Residents claimed that this damage was a result of improper maintenance, beginning sometime during 2020.



At the top of one of the two stairwells, there was debris from the walls littering the steps, exposed wiring, nails jutting out of the walls, and a hole in the walls leading to a cavernous space.









In the former Lounge Area, there is no tiling on the ceiling, leading to exposed wiring hanging from the ceiling, as well as uncovered piping.



b. The Elevators

The Elevators at Hoffman Hotel, which have their own storied history,¹⁰ are only in partial use. The only current functioning elevator did not have a current permit from the Indiana Homeland Security Department at the time (February 9th, 2026). The vent within the functioning elevator was covered with what looked to be some kind of fungus. Residents recently reported that the certification had been updated and placed between both elevators, although the fungus within the functioning elevator remained, and the other elevator was still not operational.



¹⁰ Staff Report, *Our Opinion*, South Bend Tribune (Aug. 19, 2019), <https://www.southbendtribune.com/story/opinion/2019/08/29/our-opinion-the-sad-ludicrous-elevator-story-at-hoffman-hotel-apartments-in-south-bend/46494859/>.



c. Parking Lot

The Parking Lot used by residents is privately owned by Equal Development LLC. One tenant reported that the parking lot has not been plowed or maintained at any point in the past 4 years. Some Hoffman residents are disabled people and seniors, so not plowing the parking lot could lead to serious injury for a tenant while they try to get to their vehicle. Additionally, there are large potholes in the lot that have not been repaired for years. Equal Development LLC owns the parking lot used by Hoffman residents.







d. Stairwells

This past winter, freezing temperatures caused pipes in the stairwells to burst, leaving large icicles on the exposed pipes. Water leaking in the stairwells, combined with freezing temperatures, led to ice forming on the steps, creating an obvious safety hazard.



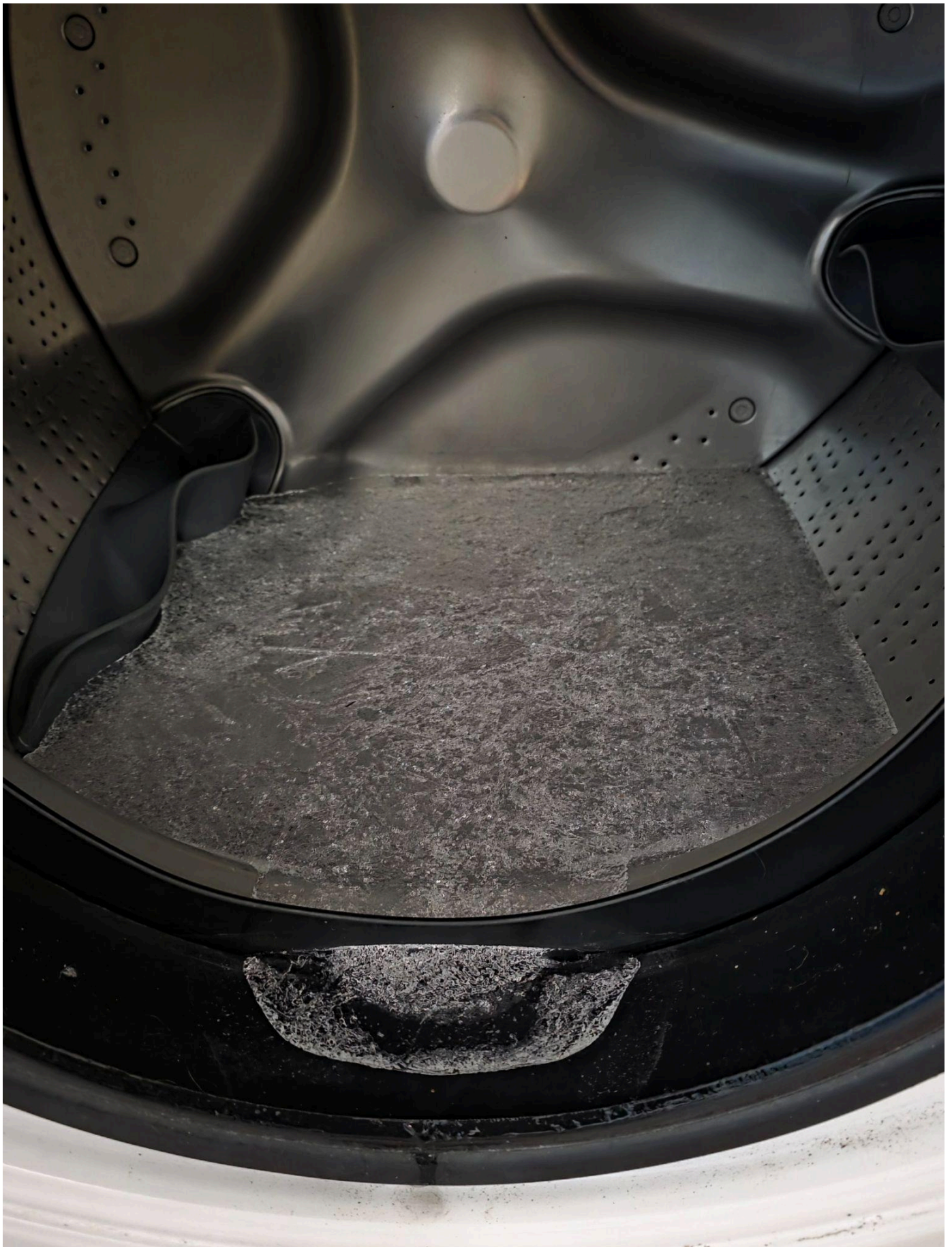


B. Living Conditions

i. Laundry Room

The washing machines in the resident laundry room regularly malfunction. One washer commonly has a pool of standing water in it at the bottom, which freezes, as the Laundry is not heated and reaches near zero temperatures during the winter. Additionally, there is trash covering the laundry. Thankfully, a heater has been installed in the laundry room since these photos were taken. Residents routinely have to make their own request for repairs to an outside company, as opposed to management addressing the issues themselves.













ii. Temperatures and Electric Bill

While management neglects heating for many common areas during the winter, residents are required to pay for their own heating by setting up a separate utility account with Indiana Michigan Power as a part of their lease. The main method of heating is via a unit attached to the window. These window units are a very inefficient way of heating, leading to some residents being charged as much as three hundred dollars for heat in an apartment that is less than 700 square feet. One tenant claimed that maintenance had come to their unit more than half a decade ago, told them that the unit had to be replaced, but failed to ever follow up. Residents on a fixed income, who receive support through federal programs, may pay less than \$ 100 in rent but three or four times that amount on their power bill.

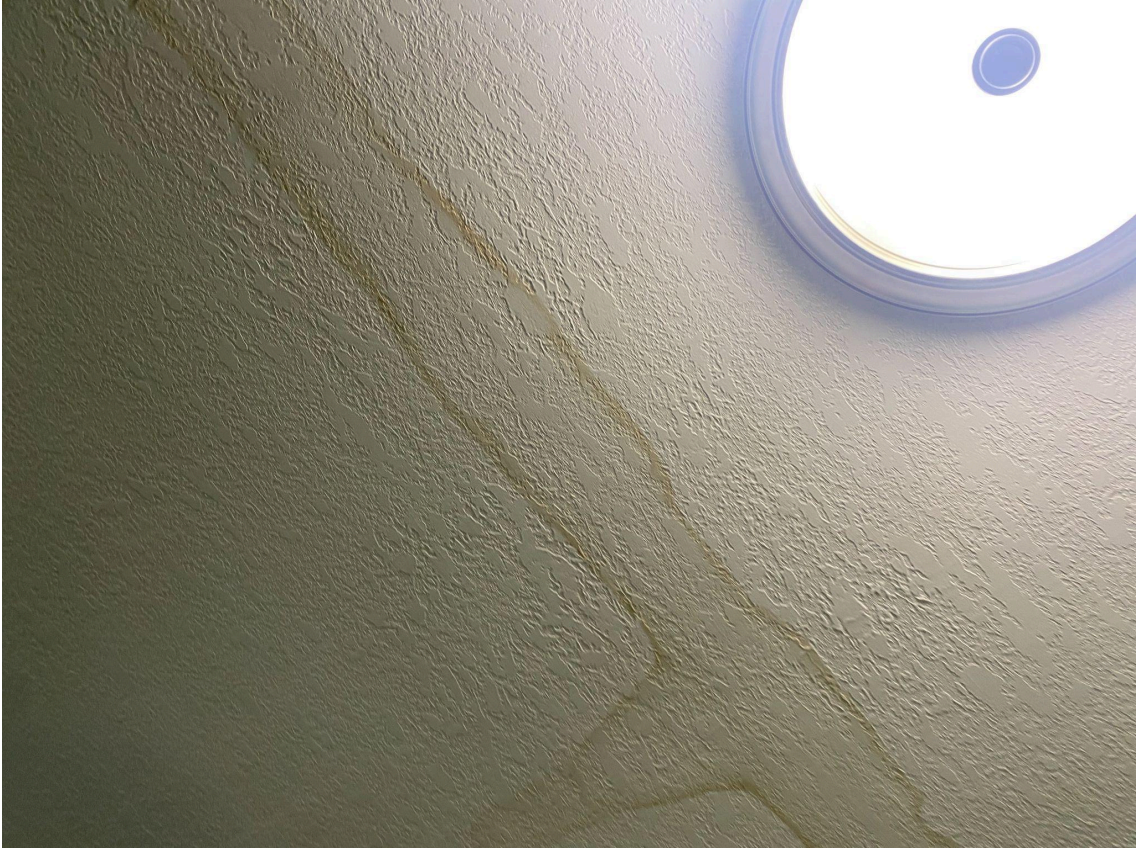
iii. Mold and Staining

Evidence of black mold on the ceilings is common at the Hoffman Hotel, and staining (possibly from leaking pipes) on the ceilings is nearly as prevalent.





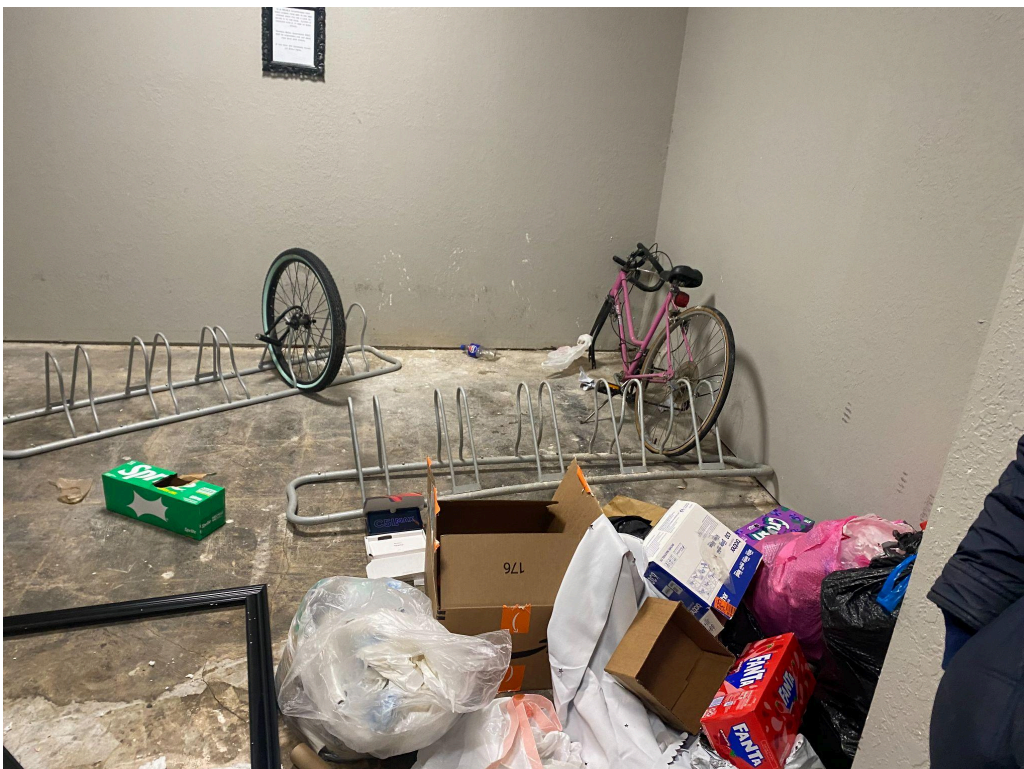






iv. Trash

Many of the Common areas mentioned above are littered with trash, as well as the bike room, which smelled like feces or the rotting body of a dead animal. The two pictures below show the bike room, followed by pictures of a trash can and sink in the laundry room, and a loose piece of insulation at the bottom of the stairwell. One resident reported an incident where a bucket of feces remained in the stairwell for weeks until a tenant made their own effort to remove it. One two separate occasions, residents found two different pungent feces stains in the stairwells.















IV. Conclusion

The Hoffman Hotel Apartments now stands as an inhabitable shell of the former cultural monument it once was. Its rich history and past devotion to the expansion of art in South Bend are overshadowed by a litany of health and safety concerns. Recent investigations have shown that the building is not just delinquent in supporting the lifestyle of local artists; rather, the apartments cannot sustain any life at all. Common areas are littered with drug paraphernalia, garbage, and makeshift sleeping arrangements for non-residents. Additionally, the structural integrity of these spaces is in a state of complete degradation. Rooms designed for productivity, socialization, and passing through the building are avoided by tenants due to protruding rusted nails, scattered debris, and black mold. Necessary building amenities, such as elevators and laundry machines, are either unsafe for use or completely past the point of operation. Furthermore, tenants are deprived of the proper maintenance provided in their lease agreements. Even the parking lots outside the building pose serious risks of injury. Amidst all of these conditions, tenants are still financially burdened with exorbitantly high utility rates. This statement from the Notre Dame Law School Eviction Clinic has hopefully shed light on the serious defects of an important landmark in the community. We hope that this investigation may yield local attention from the community and action on the part of the building management.