

UPTOWN, EDGEWATER, ROGERS PARK

As Uptown Loses Another SRO, Low-Income Renters Forced To Leave Area: 'Rent Is Skyrocketing'

The Chatelaine is the second SRO in Uptown to be sold or close due to building conditions since December. There are fewer and fewer places for their low-income residents to turn for housing — and some may end up on the street.



By Reema Saleh
3 hours ago



Neighbors rally to save two single-room occupancy buildings at risk of closure in Edgewater. Credit: Reema Saleh for Block Club Chicago

UPTOWN — When her mother died during the pandemic, Cheia Myers suddenly needed to find housing on

her own. She couldn't afford much of Uptown's housing stock, but she wanted to stay in the neighborhood where she grew up.

Myers found an apartment at the Chatelaine, a 68-unit single-room occupancy (SRO) building at 4911 N. Winthrop Ave. A few blocks from the Argyle Red Line stop, the apartment let her stay close to her work and friends. But in four years of living there, she watched the building's problems begin to stack up.

The winter cold would get so bad that she'd turn on her oven for heat. The elevator had been broken down for years, she said. What was worse was the bed bugs, which ruined her bedding and furniture, and the mice that scurried through holes in the wall.

"I don't know why they treated the building like that. And how they got away with it for so long is beyond me," Myers said. "They've been written up so much, for the elevator being out of order, and multiple people calling 311."

As an SRO building, the Chatelaine offered cheap rents for dormitory-like rooms to low-income renters who may otherwise face homelessness. Many SROs face issues of disrepair and dangerous building conditions, with their owners often selling the building — in some cases to a for-profit developer — rather than deal with the needed costly repairs.

The Chatelaine appears to be facing a similar fate.

Last year, the Chatelaine's owner announced his intent to sell the building. The landlord recently secured a buyer, and tenants were given until the end of February to move out.

With Chatelaine tenants being forced to move — and with other SRO buildings in Uptown **recently closing** — the former renters and their advocates say low-income renters increasingly have fewer places to live, especially on the North Side.

“Trying to stay in the neighborhood is hard because rent is skyrocketing,” Myers said. “All these old places are now [luxury apartments], and they’re starting at like \$1,200 and up for a studio.”



Chatelaine resident Cheia Myers speaks at a rally to save two single-room occupancy buildings at risk of closure in Uptown. Credit: Reema Saleh for Block Club Chicago

Uptown's Disappearing SROs

It is unclear who is in line to purchase the Chatelaine or what the future plans are for the property. Advocates believe the new owner is a for-profit buyer. SRO buildings being sold must go through a city mandated preservation-buying period, when it is available to only buyers who would keep it affordable. The preservation period ended without such a buyer coming forward, advocates and housing organizers said.

A property sale has not been reflected in public records. Its owner, Sieglinde Schumacher, could not be reached for comment.

Buildings like the Chatelaine are on the decline. Nearly 40 percent of the city's SRO buildings have closed

since 2014, according to a [2024 study](#) by the University of Illinois Chicago.

Over the past decade, at least five SRO buildings have closed down or converted into market-rate housing, according to [city data](#). Recently closed or redeveloped Uptown SROs include the [Darlington](#), [Lorali](#), [Hazelton](#) and former the [Wilson Men's Club](#).

That doesn't include the Northmere, an SRO building at 4943 N. Kenmore Ave. [The city closed the building late last year due to hazardous conditions](#), causing its tenants to relocate. Like the Chatelaine, the Northmere's future is uncertain, leaving two of the last remaining Uptown SROs in limbo.

Finding other affordable housing in the area is increasingly difficult. DePaul University's Institute for Housing Studies [found that](#) the share of affordable units in the Uptown-Rogers Park area decreased by nearly 13 percentage points by 2021.

“One thing that's still true about the SROs is that it's kind of a last opportunity for many before homelessness,” said Dordie Hester, housing justice organizer at ONE Northside. “You can get in an SRO without good credit. You can be a returning citizen. They accept people who in market-rate housing are not accepted.”





The Chatelaine SRO building at 4911 N. Winthrop Ave. Credit: Reema Saleh for Block Club Chicago

'It Was Raining In My Bathroom'

In January 2025, Chatelaine tenants began organizing with ONE Northside, the Uptown nonprofit organizing around housing justice and other social causes, over the building issues and the possibility of displacement.

The group worked with neighbors like Carol Collins, who often struggled to get the building manager to make repairs, she said. For years, she would use the bathroom with an umbrella to keep water from the ceiling from splashing on her.

“When [they] finally came and fixed it, the water had run over to where the light fixture is. When my neighbor upstairs bathed, it was like it was raining in my bathroom. It would take a couple of years before they fixed that,” she said.

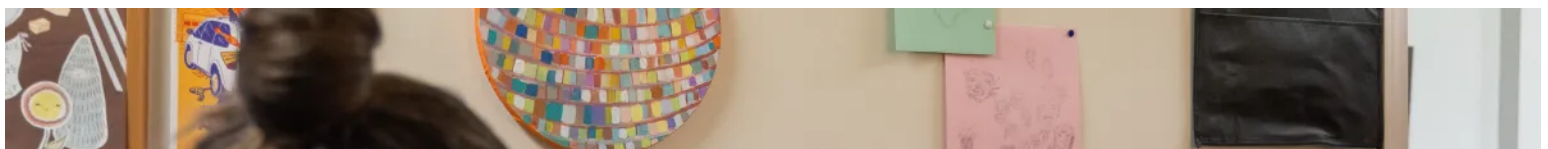
Last year, the Chatelaine failed five building inspections, city records show. Code violations included severe bed bug and roach infestations as well as signs of rodent activity, water damage, mold and other issues, according to court documents.

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“Many of the tenants were trying to live as best they could and make the best of the situation at hand. We’d go into people’s units, and the furnishing would be nice, but there would be literally clusters of bed bugs in the corners of the walls,” said Arie Vennick, tenant organizer for ONE Northside.

In July, the city filed a lawsuit against Schumacher, the Chatelaine’s landlord, for building code violations. The Chatelaine’s tenants sought to join the city’s lawsuit, calling themselves the Winthrop Tenants Organization, and finding representation at the community legal clinic Uptown People’s Law Center.

They first petitioned to intervene in the case last September to advocate for building repairs and to pressure the landlord to provide more time and money to relocate.





Cheia Myers (right) speaks with social worker Aubrey Dvorak at the Uptown People's Law Center office on Feb. 10, 2024. Credit: Reema Saleh for Block Club Chicago

Fighting Displacement

The group also claims that the landlord closed the laundry room to all tenants for two months shortly after they formed a tenant association. Some tenants also said they stopped receiving mail for three months due to the building manager.

“We tried to intervene in the building court case as a party, become a party to the lawsuit, have our own complaint, our own discovery, our own witnesses, and ultimately a seat at the settlement table to figure out what’s going on in the building,” Uptown People’s Law Center attorney Wren Higgins said.

Both the landlord and the city challenged their standing in the case. At a January hearing, a judge ruled that the Chatelaine’s tenants could not join the case, Higgins said. The case is ongoing.

Over the past few months, many tenants have worked with a housing navigator paid for by Schumacher. Under the city’s SRO Preservation Ordinance, all tenants will receive a \$2,000 check upon relocation, but the tenants could have gotten better accommodations if they were allowed to be party to the lawsuit, Vennick said.

“Many of the people living in these buildings are folks who should be in supportive housing, with services that are helping support them as opposed to living in a building full of bed bugs because that’s the only affordable option that they can find,” he said. “It would have made it a lot easier to find a landing spot for some of these folks if we had been able to strike a more reasonable deal with the landlord, as opposed to getting the bare minimum.”

While the Chatelaine’s future is still up in the air, many of the incentives for preserving SRO buildings have vanished, and more SRO owners are getting out of the business, Vennick said.

“I think this is not a good sign for SROs in the city or for affordable housing in the area,” he said. “This is a citywide structural issue about putting in regulations and providing money to keep this form of affordable housing — this last stop before the street — a resource for people in the city.”

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