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Citing crime, city aims to shut down Deluxe Inn

City attorney warns owner: One more strike, you're out

By RACHAEL ZYLSTRA

The Deluxe Inn motel just south of downtown Lansing may be more than what people bargain for when looking for a pleasant night's stay away from home.

The motel, at 112 E. Main, provides more than just a room — it's a hotbed for drug-related activity, Lansing City Attorney Brigham Smith said.

And after 1,600 police calls to the motel since 2000, Smith wants to shut it down.

Smith's office hand-delivered a letter of first notice to the motel on Monday to inform its owner, Pete Bhakta, of the city's intent.

"Simply put," Smith wrote in the letter, "this is your official notice that you have one strike. If you get a second strike within the next six months, I will pursue a board-up action against the Deluxe Inn under the Lansing Code of Ordinances."

According to the letter, if police investigate the motel within six months from the issuance of the letter, the city of Lansing may padlock and board up the motel for up to one year, effectively closing it down.

Whether the second strike comes is now in the hands of Bhakta.

Bhakta declined to comment when reached Tuesday. Bhakta's attorney, Robert McCarthy, said his client has "cooperated in every way possible with the city of Lansing."

"We do not think the letter is justified or has an adequate basis of fact," McCarthy said. "We don't believe the city is correct in any determination contained in the letter."



Smith

Smith said he thinks a carrot-and-stick approach is the best way to handle the motel: Bhakta can take the carrot and use the city letter as a tool to better the motel, or he

can choose the stick, get a second strike and watch his business evaporate.

"I'd love nothing more to have the carrot approach work and see a perfect gateway between REO Town and downtown Lansing," Smith said.

Smith said he is working with others to persuade Bhakta to sell the motel.

See Motel, Page 8

Motel

from page 7

"There are a lot of good fits for the location," Smith said. "In fact, a lot of parties are interested, so I'm hoping we'll be able to reach a true win-win for everybody."

The calls and investigations, most relating to prostitution and drug-related activity, have been a growing concern for Lansing residents and officials.

Lansing City Council President Harold Leeman Jr. said the city met with the owner of the motel a few years ago to address the numerous police calls received.

"He cleaned up the place by putting up video cameras and said he'd do his best to get rid of the undesirables," Leeman said.

But the undesirables are still present.

Like in the June 26, 2006, police investigation of Rooms 118 and 135 of the Deluxe Inn, which found evidence of drug paraphernalia.

Or the July 18 and Aug. 21 investigations that found similar evidence in Rooms 119 and 152, respectively.

Or the August homicide in Room 150.

As a result, police patrol has increased around the area, in hopes of reducing the number of crimes.

"Whenever we have a situation like this, we do spend a lot of time there and try to work with the management to alleviate as many problems as we can," police Lt. Bruce



Rachael Zylstra/City Pulse

Checkout: Lansing officials hope to close the Deluxe Inn, 112 E. Main St., for what they say is its long history of attracting crime.

Ferguson said.

So how exactly did the motel become a breeding ground for crime? The reputation of the motel has long been as a place to get a few extra bucks in any way but the legal way, Smith said.

"You can have a mass built on crime, and the Deluxe Inn has been an anchor on it for a long time," he said.

Closing the hotel could concern some social service agencies, which often use the motel to house the homeless or struggling families.

"It's convenient, but it's not the best place for families to be," Smith said. "If this was your family and you needed service and you were cold, you wouldn't want this place to be your manger. And that has been one of the problems we've been facing."

Leeman said he hopes the motel will still benefit the nonprofit agencies, no matter what happens. "If we board up or if there's another use with the motel, hopefully we will know other avenues when it comes to helping people out when it comes to shelter," he said.