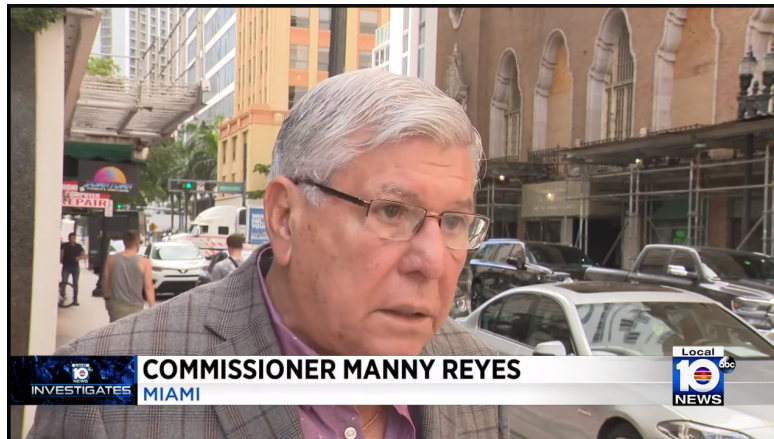


[Link to article](#)

In meeting, tenants seek answers from city after historic Miami high-rise suddenly evacuated

'We don't know if we're going to survive,' one business owner says



Tenants and owners in a century-old downtown high-rise pressed Miami officials for answers Friday after they suddenly [deemed their building unsafe and evacuated it](#) this week.

Everyone in the historic Huntington Building in downtown Miami, with its 100 years of history outlined in the lobby, is now in the process of moving out because the structure was deemed unsafe last week.

Firefighters flooded the hallways while working to clear the offices inside the building, located at 168 SE First St.

On Friday, during a Downtown Development Authority meeting, tenants heard from Miami Fire Rescue Chief Joseph Zahralban and City Commissioner Manolo Reyes.

According to the city, a fire inspection uncovered illegal remodeling that restricted access to fire exits, a life safety issue.

Zahralban said it meant people “could not get out of the building as quickly as (Miami Fire Rescue) would like them to as required by the fire life safety code.”

“Once it is brought to my attention, as the fire chief we have a responsibility,” Zahralban told tenants. “God forbid a fire or other emergency exists in that building and someone perishes, I knew and chose to do nothing about it.”

Some tenants questioned the need to evacuate every floor of the building, including those without violations.

They also noted that some of the buildings on the ground floor were allowed to continue operating.

March 24, 2023

Unique Monthly Visitors: 1,900,000

“Right now we’re on the street; we cancelled programs, we’re losing thousands of dollars,” Diliانا Alexander, who operates a film and arts nonprofit on the building’s fourth floor, said. “We don’t know if we’re going to survive. We don’t have any violations, so why did you close every single floor?”

She added: “We thought that by now the fire department would have a clearer idea of what it will take for us to cure and go back in the building and they don’t.”

Reyes said he is now working with tenants to help fast-track a resolution. He said city inspectors initially responded to the property over several businesses failing to obtain required certificates to operate.

“It was a fire exit that was missing,” Reyes said. “That’s what I was informed and then they decided to call (the fire department).”

Local 10 News asked Zahralban if he had specifics on what prompted the inspection. He said he did not have that information available right now.

As for some of those safety concerns, owners say that they use those fire exits and that some of those safety issues were remedied simply by removing doors.

City officials said it’s not that simple, however, and permits will likely be required, and possibly construction, before owners and tenants are allowed back in the building.

The Huntington Building, erected a few years before the Great Depression, was added to the [U.S. National Register of Historic Places](#) on Jan. 4, 1989.

“Completed at the peak of the Land Boom, the 13-story Huntington Building is known for the sculptures resembling knights that circle its roofline, and the whimsical masks and sculptured urns on the building’s (façade),” a city of Miami website dedicated to historic preservation states.