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# Who Killed Belltown's McGuire? The Cast of Characters

By [Michael van Baker](#)

Editor

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Bing's Streetside view captures the scaffolded

Kicker of the McGuire broke that a [25-story high-rise in Belltown, The McGuire, would be torn down](#) just nine years after construction, due to "defects." The \$31-million apartment tower, at [210 Wall Street](#), had been [clad in scaffolding for months](#), as the owners tried to deal with cracking and spalling of the concrete exterior, due to problems with reinforcement placement in the building's frame.

Further investigation revealed that [post-tensioned slabs](#)--widely used in high-rises to help support and strengthen the concrete, and allow for thinner floors--contained cables that were corroding. (After it opened, The McGuire fairly quickly had troubles with water entering the building's envelope, and then the wrong paint and grout had been used to protect the cables from water, as well.) The City of Seattle Department of Planning and Development told the owners to repair it or vacate by the end of 2010.

Given the costs of repair, the [Carpenters Union Local 131](#) and MEPT, the Multi-Employer Property Trust, gave hundreds of residents notice to vacate. (The McGuire's original developers were the Carpenters Union Local 131 and [Harbor Properties](#).) Ronald Holden, Belltown's eyes and ears, reports on his blog

Cornichon that [residents are being offered substantial incentives](#) to quit the building by May 15.

Legal advisers [Kennedy Associates](#) said the owners were suing the general contractor and architects. [Emporis.com](#) and the city's permits confirm that the general contractor on the project was the [national firm McCarthy Building Companies, Inc.](#), one of the top ten commercial builders in the U.S. Here is their differentiator:

Because we are true builders, owners get more and better options. Faster and safer execution. And a clear cost/benefit solution that yields the best final cost, every time.

Structural engineers were [ABKJ](#), who also worked on [Harbor Steps](#) and Belltown's [Arbor Place](#). [Architecture firm Hewitt](#) has a long list of Seattle projects, from Harbor Steps and Belltown's [The Klee](#) lofts and suites, to the Capitol Hill light rail station and University Village. Most recently, they are working on [Belltown's Third & Cedar project](#), a 17-story tower with about 200 units, funded by HB Capital.

Problems with condo construction the last decade are nothing new, as illustrated by this [KUOW story from 2008](#), or this [Seattle Times story from 2003](#)--which specifically calls out "water damage to buildings--damage that sometimes costs as much to fix as the project cost to build." Nor are [construction defects limited to Belltown](#).

After a decade or more of water-damage complaints, it seems that leaving [rain screen systems](#) solely to the discretion of architects and developers isn't working. (The McGuire, unfortunately, used stucco in its outer envelope--which can become water-logged from wind-driven rain--and did not to my knowledge employ a rain screen.) A thriving industry in rain screen system consultants and waterproofing has since grown up in the Northwest, after the condo construction between 1995 and 2001 revealed our region's tendency to "soak in it." Maybe it's time to require developers and contractors to demonstrate water-resistance know-how during construction, rather than afterward.

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lesson's learned

This is one really expensive lesson. Probably there needs to be better education about the use of the proper systems and methods to build rather than strict government oversight.

Comment by Daniel Bretzke

1 hour ago

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