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Building maintenance

By Brian Lockhart

Commerce Court in downtown Toronto is a huge skyscraper that once dominated the skyline.

It has 57 stories and is 942 feet tall. It was constructed from steel and glass for a very modern look for the time.

I'm not sure what its lifespan was predicted to be but it was opened in 1972, so it is now 52 years old.

I had an uncle who worked there and he took us for a tour and we visited the observation level. It was, at the time, the tallest building, by far, in the city.

The Empire State Building in New York City is one of the most recognizable buildings in the world. Built in the Art Deco style and finished in 1931, it was the world's tallest building for almost 40 years.

At 93 years old, it has outlived its designers and builders, and the vast majority of people who were alive when it was completed.

There must be a large team of maintenance people who keep these buildings operating and in good shape.

I'm sure there are structural engineers who routinely examine these buildings to make sure they are safe.

A structural failure in a building that size could have catastrophic results.

A couple of years ago I watched an interesting British TV documentary-type show that examined what happens to a home when it is abandoned and no one is living in it.

It was amazing to see how fast the property deteriorated.

Once the human occupants moved out, the animal world moved in. At first, it was insects of all kinds. Then larger animals like mice, squirrels, and similar rodents.

They all made a mess, and there was no one there to clean it up.

From there, other things started to happen. Mold and fungus started to grow in some areas.

With no heating or cooling system to maintain a livable temperature, the structure itself started to weaken.

Things like floorboards on the front porch started to warp. If left unchecked, the house would eventually collapse on itself.

Fortunately for this house, another family bought the place, moved it, and renovated it. It once again housed several people.

A building must be maintained.

If you're a homeowner, you know what it's all about. It's always something.

The Ontario Science Centre is now closed due to structural problems.

The provincial government is indicating it is closed for good.

The Science Centre was an outstanding achievement. I recall visiting on a school field trip a few years after it was opened. It had amazing hands-on exhibits.

Every year, thousands of students around the province made the trek to the Science Centre for field trips. It was a full day of adventure and learning, in a place that made learning fun.

The Science Centre opened in 1969 making it 55 years old.

The plan is to move the Science Centre to Ontario Place and use the current land for housing.

Imagine that ? the province selling public land to developers. There's way too much of that nonsense going on.

The Science Centre was built in a wooded, ravine area for a reason. It was to create an oasis of sorts in the middle of a heavily populated area that has largely been paved over.

Consultants estimated the cost of repairs to bring the Science Centre up to snuff, to be in the hundreds of millions of dollars.

Ontario Place does not have the space to build a new Science Centre.

Most likely, the Science Centre will not be rebuilt ? at least not in the way that it currently exists.

Most likely there will be ?talks' about it for a while, then it will quietly fade away, until it will just be a footnote in history.

What happened to make a 55 year-old building so dangerous that it had to be closed due to the potential of a roof collapse?

There are millions of homes that are over 55 years old and still lived in ? because their owners maintain them.

Maybe the real question should be: who was responsible for a building that was so neglected that it got to the point that it wasn't safe to be occupied? And after just 55 years?

If maintenance teams can keep buildings like Commerce Court and the Empire State building safe and in good shape after all these years, the Science Centre should also still be a viable and safe place.