

Mold complaints mount in Parkland



Parkland homeowners concerned about mold in newly built homes listen to Dennis Mele, a representative for WCI Communities Inc., CalAtlantic Homes and Toll Brothers. (Carline Jean / Sun Sentinel)



By **Paul Owers**
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Close to 100 people packed Parkland City Hall on Wednesday to demand answers and plead for help in ridding their homes of mold.

The city called the special meeting to give WCI Communities Inc., Toll Brothers and CalAtlantic Homes the chance to explain what they're doing to address the issue for homeowners.

But residents blasted the builders, saying they aren't serious about solving the problem. Even Mayor

Christine Hunschofsky was unimpressed, scolding the builders' representative, attorney Dennis Mele, for not providing more detailed information.

Hunschofsky opened the meeting by saying the city had no legal authority over the builders, aside from making sure the homes were built to code. But after listening to worries of sick children and lower property values, the mayor asked city officials to investigate whether the city can take a more active role in helping residents.

"This is extremely important to us as your representatives," she told the crowd.

In a brief presentation, Mele said mold is common in humid climates and is not unique to the upscale homes in Parkland, some worth well more than \$1 million. He said the builders are working diligently to identify and remove the mold, hiring third-party engineers and independent companies.

"All of [the builders] are doing the best job they can in communicating with each individual homeowner," he said.

But residents scoffed at the explanation, insisting the builders are tight-lipped and defensive. One resident said it was a "disgrace" that officials from WCI, Toll and CalAtlantic sent Mele in their place to face the crowd.

Some residents said the builders blamed them for the mold because they set their thermostats at lower than 75 degrees.

"The underlying problem is not being fixed," said Scott Kilgore, a resident in a Toll Brothers home in Parkland Golf & Country Club. "They think it's my fault."

Kilgore was one of about 15 residents who addressed city commissioners at the nearly hourlong meeting. He said WCI, Toll and CalAtlantic should not be allowed to continue building homes in the city until the problem is finally fixed, drawing applause from fellow homeowners.

It remains unclear how many homes in Parkland may be affected or if any other builders in the city have mold issues.

Hundreds of homes have been built in Parkland in recent years. The city is the last area of Broward County with enough land to accommodate large-scale home construction.

City officials have approved permits for fixes the three builders hope will solve the problem. WCI's permit

application details plans to install a dehumidifier, while CalAtlantic and Toll are using spray foam insulation.

Mark Moran said he moved last summer into a rented WCI-built house in Heron Bay and later noticed water dripping from his son's closet.

Moran and his wife, Jeanie, began to suspect mold when their daughters started getting unexplained swollen glands and hives. They said they recently paid for a home inspection, which attributed the mold to unsealed vents and light fixtures during construction.

Moran, a pediatric orthopedic surgeon who did not get to speak at Wednesday's meeting due to time constraints, said the community of doctors, lawyers and other professionals will continue to press for answers.

"They're drawing on their expertise to come together and not take the brush-off from these companies," Moran said. "It's not just going to go away."

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