

Rapacious landlords are culpable

Kudos to Rory Appleton for giving us better than dueling quotes in his Dec. 1 article on Summerset Village. He duly reported the owner's claim to have been "unaware" of any problems. With journalistic due diligence, Mr. Appleton checked on that claim, finding "large holes" in some roofs, among other obvious violations. As a reader, I appreciate that bigger, more accurate, picture.

But Mr. Appleton missed a crucial opportunity to widen our field of view still further, to scrutinize the city of Fresno's role. With multiple deaths from fires over a 20-year period, and a documented lack of smoke alarms, it'd be hard for Fresno code enforcement authorities to claim "surprise" at the number and seriousness of the code violations on this property.

Make no mistake: the city is an equally culpable actor in this human tragedy. Its failure over many years to force this landlord to make his rental units safe and healthy for tenant families is morally – and legally – exactly as though city firefighters had refused to respond to a raging house fire, or city police officers had refused to respond to a burglary in progress.

The city's law-enforcement function includes protecting tenants from rapacious landlords. Let's get to it.

Patience Milrod, Fresno