

City 'quality of life' questions remain

◆ **Complaints:**
Aldermanic committee takes a look.

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MANCHESTER — City Hall continued to struggle last night with how to best address residents' quality-of-life complaints.

In a continuing conversation on ways to fight garbage, unsightly neighborhoods and abandoned or neglected properties, aldermen on the Committee on Administration and Information Systems urged city officials to better coordinate efforts, lessen the amount of paperwork and more aggressively

enforce ordinances.

One member offered the addresses of several problem properties to Building Commissioner Leon LaFreniere that he said the city has ignored.

"I've been trying to get the Granite Street neighborhood cleaned up for years and I've had it up to here," said Alderman George Smith of Ward 10. "I want something to be done. I'm sick and tired of going to Granite Street every single day."

Aldermen have long complained that zoning enforcement efforts have not kept up with the growth of problems in the city. In response, the city has established a team of

► See Life, Page B2

officials who police violations, while also asking its housing code inspectors to also keep an eye out for quality-of-life violations.

Two aldermanic committees have endorsed doubling the first-offense fine for zoning violations, an issue that goes before the full board next week.

But neighborhood activists have said the results residents are calling for still aren't been seen.

"Zero," was how Dick Duck-off, the vice chairman of the North End Neighborhood As-

sociation, last night described the improvement in Building Department enforcement.

The committee said city officials need to streamline jurisdictional issues that lead to many departments having to be involved with a problem property. They said technology could be used to better track the citation process, as well as cut down on amount of paperwork required.

"We handle a piece of paper on an address too many times," said Alderman At-large Dan O'Neil, the chairman of the committee.

Another idea was changing state law to heighten zoning offenses to a misdemeanor, from today's violation status, a proposal Alderman and State Sen. Betsi DeVries of Ward 8 said is now in committee in the Legislature.

LaFreniere told the committee that his housing inspectors wrote 91 zoning-related citations in 2006. In January, seven additional ones were issued.

LaFreniere also offered two examples of court cases that stemmed from property owners who ignored city rules.

In one 2002 case, city officials wrote \$17,000 worth of tickets for a property. Eventually, a judge gave the property owner a \$1,000 suspended fine, though only after the owner happened to appear in court on an unrelated matter.

In the second case, a violator was issued five citations on Oct. 10 and another five a day later. The violator did not appear in court and was found in default.

Three additional citations were issued in November, and the property owner pleaded guilty to them. A court hearing is scheduled for Feb. 13.

LaFreniere said the two cases are successes for the city, since both led to the violations getting addressed.

"This type of action should not be seen as a means of generating revenue," said LaFreniere.

NEW HAMPSHIRE
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Wednesday, February 14, 2007 • Page B1