

Hef-tier fines for landlords OK'd

◆ **Code breakers:** Aldermen hear complaints about messy properties.

By **MARK HAYWARD**

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MANCHESTER — Targeting irresponsible landlords, aldermen last night increased fines for property owners who don't follow codes dealing with the safety, sanitation and the appearance of

properties in the city.

But even before the board voted on the ordinance, several residents complained that not enough is being done to force landlords to clean up their properties.

Dick Duckoff, a neighborhood activist, complained about the

way he was treated by a building department official. Duckoff has delivered 135 to 150 complaints to the Neighborhood Enforcement Team for investigation.

"There's no enforcement. There's boats all over the city in front yards. RVs are 2 inches from homes. This is a city; it's not the country," Duckoff said.

West Side activist Chris Leone complained about a lack of response from certain city officials

he did not name. And activist Glenn Ouellette pointed out properties on Mast Road and Parker Avenue that include unregistered vehicles, tires, glass, broken furniture and temporary tents.

"It should not be the job of city employees to determine who has the right to break city ordinances and who should or should not pay the fines set by (aldermen)," Ouellette wrote.

Both Mayor Frank Guinta and Alderman at-large Mike Lopez addressed the comments in a general sense. Guinta said people should contact him or an alderman if they do not believe their concerns have been addressed.

"Any citizen who has a complaint against something in the city, they should get an answer,"

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Lopez said.

Building Commissioner Leon Lafreniere said he realizes the frustration out there. Because of cutbacks, inspectors have been limited to addressing life-safety issues such as handrails, smoke detectors and stairways.

Now that a housing inspector joined the staff two weeks ago, aesthetic issues and the backlog of complaints can be addressed, Lafreniere said.

The ordinance passed last night establishes a \$200 fine for a first offense, compared to \$100 previously. Fines for second and third offenses are \$300 and \$500. Also, fines will double if they are not paid in seven days.

"It's fantastic," said Will Stewarts, community services specialist for NeighborWorks GreaterManchester. "It's a signal that the city is really beginning to take this issue seriously."