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Homeowners and landlords spar over proposed changes

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Chronicle Staff Writer STORRS - Those who live in their houses were pitted against those who rent them during a contentious Mansfield Town Council public hearing about proposed rule changes targeting landlord homeowners. Those filling the council chambers of the Audrey P. Beck Municipal Building Monday night saw conversations go from discussing proposed amendments to **housing** regulations to the regulations themselves. The amendments would eliminate loopholes allowing single-family homes to be exempted from town rental regulations, which currently can encourage student rentals in residential neighborhood homes. That situation concerns resident homeowners, who fear rowdy University of Connecticut student behavior can tarnish the character of a residential neighborhood - and their property values. The public hearing, which lasted 90 minutes, was closed and councilmen will further discuss the issue at the next council meeting Aug. 8 at 7 p.m. in the council chambers. It is uncertain whether a vote will be taken at that time. While Mansfield Mayor Paul Shapiro said the council could have a second public hearing, he said "people can address the council in public participation (period)," and he would be "happy to hear from everyone." At the beginning of Monday's hearing, Mansfield Neighborhood Preservation Group co-founder Rebecca Shafer told the council there have been a number of loud parties this summer, with students renting out units as "a hop house, I think it's only used for parties and gatherings." She said some of these houses, which she claimed are not properly maintained and are overcrowded, are owned by **UConn** staff members who own homes elsewhere in town away from students. Her group is a town-gown organization that reported it is working to maintain the integrity of neighborhoods. (Homeowners, Page 4) (Continued from Page 1) Town regulations only allow three unrelated people to live in the same house unless the house was grandfathered previous to 2010, in which case up to four unrelated people are allowed to live there. While Shafer said she is a familiar face to town council meetings, there were many new faces, including homeowners and students, representing those who have a different take on the topic. David Byrd, **UConn** student body president, said "the town has an obligation to improve outreach efforts of overcrowding. I don't want five students to sign a lease when only three are allowed. The town should work with the (**UConn**) office of off-campus **housing**." He said he is disappointed the council had a public hearing in July during the university's summer recess, despite more than 300 people signing a petition asking them to wait until fall to hold hearings. John Mihalopoulos is a singlefamily rental unit owner who said he drove all the way down from Maine to attend the public hearing. He asked "I don't understand why do you discriminate (against college students)?" "We work hard to obey the laws of the town. We struggle to pay taxes. If people have a problem (with my tenants), they could call the police," he said. Mihalopoulos wants the town to hold a meeting in September so students can give their feedback. Brett Eagleson, a Middletown resident who also owns singlefamily rental units in town, said he "encourages the council to try to work with us to come up with a solution together." After the public hearing ended, Eagleson said he and other singlefamily rental unit owners believe that if the amendments are passed, "we believe a case (of discrimination) could be made if we filed a lawsuit." **UConn** student Justin Gordon accused the town of having regulations that encourage intoxicated visitors to drive home because they fear that they will be ticketed for having their vehicle parked overnight. "The fine for too many cars is \$90. It seems unfair," Gordon said. Single-family rental unit owner Craig Marcus, of

Coventry, said he gets complaints from tenants and their parents about town officials who take pictures of vehicles and houses, claiming they are stalkers. He said he also gets complaints from tenants who are targeted for having too many visitors stay overnight. "My tenants are not asking for special treatment. They are asking for equal treatment," Marcus said, adding private homeowners in Mansfield can have as many visitors as they want. This morning, Mike Nintean, the town's director of building and **housing**, said town inspectors do "go out early shortly after sunrise" to check on single-family rental units, both on a complaint and systematic basis. He confirmed these checks do not apply to families who own single-family homes. They only take pictures if a vehicle is "parked illegally or if we determined that the number (of vehicles) exceeds the number allowed," which is a maximum of six spaces per unit, he said. Council member Ben Shaiken said he would support voting on adaptation of the amendments at the Aug. 8 town council meeting. "I don't want to disrupt people in the middle of the semester. Even if there are people who signed leases, they can get their situation fixed now before the bulk of people come in for the fall," he said. If the council votes in favor of adapting the amendments, the town is required to post a notice in the newspaper within 10 days to allow residents to petition the ordinance. Such a petition would require 200 signatures of the town's registered voters but if there is no such petition, after 21 days, the ordinance would go into effect. The charter states if the petition is successfully filed, it would suspend the effective date of the ordinance forcing the council, at its next meeting, to call a town meeting in, not less than 10 but not more than 60 days. At that meeting, voters can sustain or nullify the council's action, submit it to referendum within 60 days, or take no action. If they sustain or take no action, the ordinance goes into effect at the meeting adjournment. If they vote to nullify, the ordinance is dead unless six council members vote to bring it to referendum within 60 days requiring a majority of voters to vote in favor of the ordinance for it to be adapted.

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