

Chronicle, The (Willimantic, CT)

Mansfield group: UConn students are overpopulating town

COREY SIPE

Published: March 18, 2016

Chronicle Staff Writer STORRS - Several residents and town officials continue to express concerns about what they said are students overpopulating the town in off-campus **housing**, saying the University of Connecticut accepts too many students - an assertion university officials dispute. Rebecca Shafer and Bill Roe, of Echo Road, brought their concerns to the town council Monday as members of the Mansfield Neighborhood Preservation Group. The organization was formed several months ago to protest the number of single-family homes in town being converted into rental dwellings. Shafer and Roe made a number of suggestions, specifically requesting the university require students to provide local off-campus addresses, that enrollment be capped at 90 percent of students that can be housed on campus, that all freshmen, sophomores and fraternity members live on campus, that additional apartments be built on-campus, that a limit be established for the number of cars that can be brought into the area, that the state assist Mansfield in buying back 50 percent of the houses in the neighborhoods closest to campus to make them "respectable neighborhoods," and that several academic departments be moved to other **UConn** campuses. When reached by phone this morning, Shafer said it's a "quality of life issue" and areas that have been impacted by rentals include, but are not limited to, Riverview Road, Storrs Road from the Four Corners area to Willimantic, Linwood Avenue, Birchwood Heights, Linwood Acres and Meadowood Road. Specifically, Shafer said, it discourages people from moving into town who are looking for small houses and affects property values of families who live on those streets. She said that is a problem that occurs throughout town, not just the immediate outskirts of the **UConn** campus. On Monday, Mansfield Mayor Paul Shapiro agreed, stating "there are quality of life issues in our neighborhoods ... a whole neighborhood changes," as the result of increasing numbers of students living in single-family homes. Specifically, residents have said some of the students renting houses walk through their proper- (Group, Page 4) (Continued from Page 1) ties, drop empty beer bottles and have loud house parties. "We don't disagree there are a lot of students living in singlefamily homes. Some students prefer a house," said Michael Kirk, **UConn's** deputy chief of staff. He said he believes that after the university announced its Next Generation initiative in 2013, developers bought up houses in Mansfield to lease out to students. John Armstrong, director of offcampus services, says the university encourages off-campus students to live in high-density **housing** near the bus line but admits there are more than 400 single-family rental homes where students live. Kirk said "student behavior is the problem, not the number of students." University officials say 71 percent of students live on-campus and **UConn** was ranked No. 2 in highest percentage of students living on-campus, according to a U.S. News and World Report, "Academic Insights," which rated the top 51 public national universities, and give their respective percentage of college-owned, operated or affiliated **housing**. Shapiro contended the percentage is not high enough, "creating a need for more **housing**." Michael Gilbert, vice president of student affairs at **UConn**, said the university has, in fact, added on-campus **housing** as enrollment grew. A chart issued by the university shows there is on-campus **housing** available for 13,048 students, which allows for 2,894 more students than in 2006, 10 years ago. Study, recreation and congregation spaces in residence halls have been "repurposed" over the years, allowing university **housing** to accommodate hundreds more students, according to Gilbert. For example, Gilbert said large, two-person rooms now house

three students while smaller, one-person rooms have been repurposed for two students. He said approximately 150 students are currently living in the Nathan Hale Inn. While town officials in a letter opposed the demolition of the Connecticut Commons dorm to allow for a new recreation center, Gilbert said the Commons is a 50-year-old building and it was expected to cost \$25 million just to upgrade electrical and plumbing and \$20 million to modernize it. **UConn** plans to close the residence hall at the end of the academic year and a new Next Generation residence complex will open in the fall, providing space for 725 students. "That's a net gain of 290 beds at the university so this still grows our capacity," he said. There is an estimated availability for 6,756 students in off-campus high-density **housing**, which has room for 2,775 more students than in 2006, Gilbert said. "We could build **housing** for 100 percent of students but we would have 30 percent vacant," Kirk said, adding there is always a percentage of students who will prefer to live off-campus. About 96 percent of freshmen and sophomores live on-campus, he said, adding he believes most of the other 4 percent live at home with their parents. There is a higher percentage of juniors and seniors living off-campus but not necessarily in Mansfield, as some commute from Willimantic, Coventry, Vernon, Manchester, and other towns.

Copyright 2016 The Chronicle Printing Company. All Rights Reserved

» **Archives Technical and Billing questions:** For questions regarding your Archives account, please send an email to thechronicle@newsbank.com.