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Our View: Mansfield may need to get tough on UConn renters
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Wednesday

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By Bulletin Editorial Board

UConn has exerted considerable effort in recent years to shed its reputation as a party school, particularly in the area of "spring weekend," the three-day annual celebration once infamous for its drunken revelry that routinely resulted in riots, fires, property damage and hundreds of arrests.

While officials have managed to bring that event under control, residents of the town of Mansfield say its problems are now spilling into their once-quiet neighborhoods more than ever, as the *Journal Inquirer* **reported over the weekend.**

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The Mansfield Neighborhood Preservation Group says part of the blame rests with UConn, which hasn't added enough campus housing as student population has exploded over the last two decades. The university says it knows of about 420 single-family rental properties in town, a small percentage of which have been identified as "problematic." The preservation group contends that more than 460 single-family homes in Mansfield have been converted to rentals recently.

Whatever the true numbers, the Mansfield town manager told the JI that it has been a growing concern — so much so that he's added police staff in his 2017-18 budget proposal.

In 2011, Mansfield passed a neighborhood nuisance ordinance designed to prevent large-scale disturbances that folks in Mansfield have seen in recent years, which have disturbed the peace, promoted underage drinking, obstructed streets, damaged property and created excessive noise. It stipulates a \$250 fine for violators of the ordinance, with repeat offenses escalating to direct fines to the property owner.

But if these disruptive parties are indeed a growing concern, the town may need to update the ordinance — to raise the fines, and perhaps to hold landlords liable for paying them from the first offense. Doing so would induce them to write more restrictive leases and intervene more swiftly when tenants are disturbing their neighborhoods.

Another thought would be to require permits, including some formal assumption of liability, for large gatherings — for example, when more than 50 people are gathered outdoors and alcohol is being served — and to shut down parties swiftly when tenants can't produce their permits.

Clearly neither police presence nor the existing fine structure is sufficient to deter misbehavior. Stricter town ordinances might be the next step.

That's our opinion. What's yours? Email letters@norwichbulletin.com.