

Chronicle, The (Willimantic, CT)

Mansfield takes aim at off-campus housing

CHRIS DEHNEL

Published: November 11, 2015

Chronicle Staff Writer MANSFIELD - Municipal officials are taking their closest look to date on how **housing** and zoning regulations are enforced when it comes to rental units in town. The implication from residents who have complained to Mansfield Town Manager Matthew Hart and the town council is that tenants, primarily the University of Connecticut students, consistently break the rules when it comes to issues like parking and how many people are in a dwelling. Echo Road resident Rebecca Shafer went so far as to create a closed Facebook page called Mansfield Neighborhood Preservation, on which the topic has been discussed. In a letter to the council read into the record Monday, Shafer said the problem "is much bigger than I initially realized." By the end of Monday's meeting, the council had committed to forming an ad hoc committee to study the regulations and how they are enforced. (Mansfield, Page 4) (Continued from Page 1) "The committee will look at the entire range of issues," new Mansfield Mayor Paul Shapiro said this morning. "As Counselor (Antonia) Moran mentioned in her motion to create the committee, it will be a holistic look. The committee may determine that what we have on the books is fine, but it may also say we need to strengthen or put more teeth onto the existing **housing** ordinances and zoning regulations." Administrators presented the council with a comprehensive look at every ordinance and regulation. Many of the regulations are based on input from the Committee on Quality of Life that met in 2004 into 2005 and from 2008 to 2012. Litter and blight standards were adopted in 2005 and a "minimum" set of **housing** standards went on the books in 2006. Several Echo Road residents have also complained with Shafer. One hot topic is off-street parking. In regulations adopted in 2010, units must have a minimum of two and no more than six exterior spaces per "dwelling unit." Residents have complained about cars parking on lawns. Another complaint has centered on occupancy. More than three unrelated people living together may not be considered a "functional family" for single-family home occupancy, according to the presentation. Shafer said many neighborhoods are being "overtaken" by "nonowner occupied rentals filled with six-plus unrelated people." "Our neighborhoods are being bought in a land grab by out-of-town investors. Is that what we want? It's time to take back our neighborhoods by enforcing the laws on the books. My neighbors and I are not the only ones that see the many cars at these houses," Shafer said in her letter. "Town officials can also see these, but turn a blind eye as they drive up and down Route 195." Administrators said violators are cited, but guests are allowed at the rental homes. Route 195 is known as Storrs Road locally. Shafer said the houses at 1008 Storrs Road and 871 Storrs Road are some of the homes targeted on the Facebook page and the "house of shame" this week is the dwelling at 78 Lynwood Road. The homes at 1 and 3 Eastwood Road have also been named as violators on the Facebook page, Shafer said. Eastwood Road resident Davis Freudmann took umbrage with that assertion. "This is not your neighborhood. This is my neighborhood and they are my neighborhood and they don't bother me," he said at Monday's council meeting. Freudmann said rental conversions are "just a market trend" and town officials going out of their way to single out landlords is a "waste of resources." He added "if we are concerned about rentals, then go to the source, the University of Connecticut and the amount of on-campus **housing** it has." UConn is in the process of adding some dorm space in several major projects. The Echo Road group suggested UConn might consider a subsidy to the town to assist with off-campus enforcement. Those who own off-campus **housing** units pay property taxes. The town gets about \$7.5 million in funds from the state's Payment in Lieu of Taxes

program for taxexempt buildings on campus. The council has yet to appoint members of the ad hoc committee.

Mansfield residents have complained to town officials about several off-campus **housing** units in town, including 1008 Storrs Road, left, and 78 Lynwood Road, right.

Roxanne Pandolfi photos

Copyright 2015 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.