

# Manchester's West Side makeover

Pretty up your property or things will get ugly



Wide junk like this. Photo taken on East Side. Photo by Lisa Brown.

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Property owners in Manchester's West Side better clean up their act.

That's the word from NeighborWorks of Greater Manchester, a community development organization tired of seeing the city trashed. The group is urging city leaders to crack down on landlords and property owners who let their properties go to seed.

"Residents of the community gave us addresses of specific properties they have issues with and we've taken photographs," said Robert Tourigny, executive director of NeighborWorks. The group is proposing changes to the city's trash ordinance aimed at enhancing the City's ability to put pressure on problem landlords and other negligent property owners.

"This fall we began meeting with people from the West Side, by West Granite Street, where there is a combination of landowners, tenants and single-family homeowners who are fed up with the lack of code enforcement. Landlords don't care who they rent to," Tourigny said.

Last week the group presented the Board of Mayor and Aldermen with a list of proposed changes to current ordinances. In Manchester, all housing code violations dealing with trash, waste storage, sidewalks and sanitation carry a \$100 fine for a first offense, \$200 for a second and \$300 for a third offense. "For some landlords, that's a slap on the wrist. It doesn't mean anything," Tourigny said. The new proposal would increase fines to \$250 for the first offense, \$500 for the second offense and \$750 for a third offense. Another recommendation would be to require all landlords and property managers to provide their tenants a pamphlet detailing the proper disposal of trash, garbage and bulky items. The recommendations will be reviewed before any ordinance changes are made.

Chris Leone, a landlord who owns property on West Granite Street, says he's tired of driving down his street and seeing it look like a dump.

"I've seen furniture, appliances, diapers, open bags of trash. Some of this stuff has been out there for over

a month," Leone said. "It's very hard to rent to people. They drive up and see the stuff and say it's too disgusting around here."

But it's not just the West Side.

"We have problems like this throughout the city, particularly where we have high-density housing with multi-families," said Frank Thomas, Director of Public Works. Along with large bulky items being left along sidewalks, regular garbage is also a problem. Thomas says too many landlords don't provide enough garbage cans for their tenants. They also don't tell new tenants how to get rid of their bulky pieces.

In Manchester, residents can call the highway department to have their junk picked up, but many people who live in rental units don't.

"In some cases, you have people move out of an apartment or get evicted, and instead of moving their stuff with them, they pile it up on the sidewalk," Thomas said. "Eventually we get a call and a complaint and we go and pick the stuff up."

Enforcing code violations dealing with trash isn't always easy.

"Sometimes when people call to schedule a pickup there are delays. Unfortunately, it could be 10 days out. If snow is on the ground, it can be delayed," said Al Kula, Manchester housing inspector. Kula says he likes to try to give people a chance to get rid of their trash before fining them.

"It's common courtesy to try to contact the property owner by phone or in writing to give them a chance to correct it." And that's where NeighborWorks and people like Leone have a problem. "The way the ordinance is structured is too lenient. Someone complains, the city has to send a letter and wait 15 days for them to acknowledge it and if they don't, they get a citation for \$100 and have another 15 days to pay. It's not uncommon for a lot of this junk to pile up," Leone said.

Thomas said he supports putting more teeth into the current ordinances, increasing fees and more.

"I think allocating more personnel to spend the time to pursue violators of the various codes and ordinances will make a difference. What we need is a trash cop," Thomas said.

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