

# New ordinances are needed to clean up Manchester

**T**AXES. Education. Crime. These are common issues in every city election. But this year Manchester voters will likely see a new issue added into the mix, one that affects more city residents (that is to say, just about all of us) on a much more regular basis (nearly every day) than just about anything else.

This issue, of course, is one of careless (often absentee) landlords and negligent property owners. Who among us doesn't pass, on a seemingly daily basis, multiple pieces of property — sometimes entire neighborhoods — that are deteriorating, often littered with piles of garbage, old furniture, rusty appliances and the like creating further eyesores? Add to this the not uncommon scene of

unregistered cars in front yards and alleyways and regular graffiti, and significant portions of Manchester are really starting to look run-down.

Several months ago, the Community Services Committee of NeighborWorks Greater Manchester rightly identified the high number of careless landlords and negligent property owners to be the city's No. 1 quality-of-life issue. After discovering that the city had no plan to address this widespread problem through ordinance change, the committee decided to do something about it.

The result was four proposed ordinance changes that the Community Services Committee feels to be a step in the right direction in cleaning up our

## ANOTHER VIEW

Will Stewart

Queen City.

The first of the committee's proposals would increase fines for several housing code and trash-related ordinance violations. Currently, if a property owner receives a fine for a violation it is a measly \$100. In 2007, \$100 doesn't go far. Indeed, it is said that a number of careless landlords and negligent property owners would much rather pay this piddling fine than to actually be bothered to clean up their act (and property). It's nothing more than a cost of doing business to them. The committee would like to see first-time fines upped to \$250.

The committee would also like to see housing code and trash-related city ordinances already on the books be more pro-actively enforced. As it now stands, many violations aren't being addressed in a timely manner, and if they are, it's often informally with no citations issued. How responsive do you think problem landlords and negligent property owners are to laws that aren't rigorously enforced?

But even if some problem property owners are cited, that's no guarantee that they'll fix the problem, or even pay their fines. This is especially true of landlords who do not themselves live in Manchester. Even citations sent via registered mail will often be returned

unclaimed. At that point, there's not much the city can do except grin and bear it. To stop this abuse, the committee would like to see liens placed on properties whose fines remain unpaid so that, if nothing else, taxpayers will get the money owed them when the property is sold.

Finally, the Community Services Committee recognizes that tenants also have a role to play in keeping their buildings and neighborhoods clean. That's why the committee proposes that landlords be required to provide their tenants with literature detailing the city's trash collection ordinances and policies.

As anyone who drives, walks, rides or runs across Manchester can plainly see, such poorly kept

properties are a big problem, and not just for the residents who live in the affected neighborhoods. Property values across the city are brought down by pockets of negligence. City tax collections are less than what they could be, meaning the rest of us have to pay more. Good landlords have problems finding tenants. The list goes on and on.

This affects us all. Every day. It cannot be ignored any longer.

Will Stewart is the community services specialist at NeighborWorks Greater Manchester and serves as staff liaison to the Community Services Committee. The committee's proposed ordinance changes are set to go before the Board of Mayor and Aldermen's Committee on Administration and Information Systems tomorrow.