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Union Leader

**Today's Quote:**

*You are a king by your own fireside,  
as much as any monarch (on) his throne.*

CERVANTES

**Editorials**

# Urban renewal

## Look to homeowners

**I**MPROVING troubled neighborhoods is not easy. As several experts told the New Hampshire Sunday News this past Sunday, it takes a combination of business, community and government efforts. As city leaders and residents look for ways to reduce crime and boost the curb appeal in some Manchester neighborhoods, including spots on the West Side in which crime recently has spiked, encouraging homeownership and discouraging large swaths of rental units needs to be a top priority.

Felix Torres, who did wonders when he was head of Manchester Neighborhood Housing Services before taking a similar position in Baltimore, noted in Sunday's story that "The lower the homeownership rate, the higher the level of social problems."

That is a truism borne out by decades of social science research. A case in point is public housing in Chicago. As columnist David Broder points out on the opposite page, Chicago's high-rise housing projects were notorious havens for gangs and drug dealers. But a restructuring of the public housing

system helped change that. Small homes replaced the massive high-rises, and renters were mixed in with homeowners. A sense of ownership over the neighborhood followed, and residents, with police help, took back their communities.

A lot of people blame absentee landlords for social problems in the city. But there are plenty of good landlords who don't happen to live in the buildings they rent. Slumlords certainly are a problem in some areas. Some bad landlords could benefit from some tutoring at the hands of those who do it better. More to the point, though, high concentrations of rental housing can undermine an area's sense of community and create conditions not conducive to building strong, safe neighborhoods.

Rental housing will always be needed in Manchester. But the city needs to be wary of creating neighborhoods in which homeowners are in the minority. Homeowners have a much larger stake in their neighborhoods than renters do. By investing in their homes, they invest in the community. And that, it turns out, means a great deal.