

Double trouble for bad landlords

◆ **City committee:** Heightened fines against neglectful landlords expected to be endorsed.

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MANCHESTER — A city panel is expected today to endorse doubling the fines for neglectful landlords, but its chairman is warning residents not to expect a sea change in neighborhoods as result of the beefed up penalties.

The Committee on Bills on Second Reading will review the

proposed ordinance during its 5 p.m. meeting at City Hall.

Under the proposal, housing code violators could be fined \$200 for the first offense, compared to \$100 today.

The heightened fines have been pushed by NeighborWorks Greater Manchester as necessary to pressure landlords to keep their properties up to snuff.

They have been criticized by

some landlords, who say irresponsible tenants, and not they, are the force behind litter and unsightly streets.

Alderman Jerome Duval of Ward 4, the chairman of the committee, yesterday cautioned that the increased fines will not serve as a panacea for lagging Manchester neighborhoods, though he supports the hikes.

Duval said enforcement is the key to keeping neighborhoods clean. Manchester has been lax in the past, and needs to look for

ways to improve its efforts, he said.

"I'm not convicted that an increase in fines is going to fix that," Duval said. "It still comes down to shortages in enforcement. We have to do a much better job."

Duval's concerns come as the city's health chief also raised issues with the beefed up penalties, though he, like Duval, said he supports them in the end.

Public Health Director Tim Soucy wrote aldermen that his department rarely issues cita-

tions for code violations, instead trying to work with landlords to get properties back in line.

In the fiscal year that ended in July, Soucy said health officials investigated 324 litter and trash complaints, but ended up writing just 11 citations.

More than 68 percent of properties were cleaned up when the Health Department first notified landlords of problems, Soucy said. Another 30 percent were addressed after a second notice

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was sent, he said.

The 11 citations were issued only after two notices went by with a response, he said.

"I believe our approach is very successful in gaining compliance quickly ... and we always make every effort to work with property owners to correct violations," Soucy wrote.

He added that he supports the increased fines for those who "blatantly disregard" ordinanc-

es.

"These property owners are clearly the minority in the community and should be held accountable," he said.

Alderman Real Pinard of Ward 6, who serves on the committee, said yesterday he believes greater penalties could dissuade landlords and tenants from ignoring cleanliness rules.

"If you don't do that, they'll keep doing it," Pinard said.