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CITY OF NEW BEDFORD
Jonathan F. Mitchell, Mayor

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PRESS RELEASE

Mayor Mitchell Proposes Stiffer Penalties for Irresponsible Absentee Landlords

Seeks Acceleration of Fine Schedule for Repeat Offenders; Chance to Reset After 1 Year

NEW BEDFORD – Mayor Jon Mitchell has submitted a proposal to the City Council which would accelerate the fine schedule for irresponsible absentee landlords and give them an opportunity to start fresh after 12 months of compliance.

Mayor Mitchell announced the proposed changes in his [Inaugural Address on Jan. 1](#), and in a Thursday filing to the City Council, wrote that the “amendments would encourage more responsible management of residential property, strengthen neighborhoods, and conserve the City’s enforcement resources.”

The current fine schedule requires 25 separate violations before City inspectors can issue the maximum fine allowed by state law, \$300. Penalties start with a warning and escalate in increments of \$25 until the maximum is reached after 25 separate offenses. Mayor Mitchell said the current fine schedule is too gradual and has impeded the City’s enforcement efforts.

Over the last five years, more than 585 properties have had more than 10 violations. Of those properties, 177 had between 20-49 violations, 49 had 50-99 violations, and 12 had more than 100 violations.

“The City’s current fine schedule has proven inadequate to curb the irresponsible management practices of some landlords,” Mitchell wrote. “Some of them have violated the trash ordinance so often that it is evident that they are simply ignoring their fine tickets ... in part because the current fine schedule does not create a strong enough incentive for repeat offenders to change their management practices.”

Mayor Mitchell proposed changing the fine structure to reach the maximum \$300 penalty after seven violations, starting with a warning and increasing in \$50 increments for each violation.

“I believe any landlord who fails to address a chronic problem after a handful of fines simply lacks the will to do it, and must be forced into compliance by the threat of higher fines,” he wrote.

City Council President Naomi R.A. Carney shared the Mayor’s sentiment that the number of fines to reach the maximum should be reduced.

“I agree that we need to look at the Code of Ordinance and reduce the 25 violations number before reaching maximum,” she said. “I look forward to the discussion.”

Additionally, Mayor Mitchell proposed a reset for landlords who actively seek to improve the conditions of their property. Under the filed amendment, the violation tally would reset to zero for any property that goes an entire year without a new violation.

“If a property owner is making genuine improvements, that landlord should have the opportunity to start over,” he wrote. “I believe this would create a compelling incentive for a landlord to improve their management practices.”