

Landlord fees has group on offensive: Organization says it will advise owners on compliance with rules

By **David Riley**

Sunday, April 16, 2006

MILFORD -- Saying local landlords need to speak with a collective voice and airing concerns with parts of the town's new apartment registration bylaw, a new group of rental property owners met for the first time yesterday.

The Greater Milford Landlord Association's founders said at the Milford Town Library the nonprofit group would be a resource for landlords to share ideas and learn the ins and outs of the regulations they need to follow.

"We're promoting unity and communication," said Adam Griffith, a founder of the association who works for GMAC Mortgage.

Jennifer Timpany, another group founder who works for Realty Executives, said the organization was sparked in part because of recent local decisions that do not always favorably treat small landlords.

"We don't like to see things passed down to us without any credit for doing the right thing," Timpany said.

Much talk focused on Milford's new apartment bylaw, approved at Town Meeting last fall. The rules require landlords to register rental units so the town can inspect them and certify the number of people who safely can live there.

Attorney Jim Hentz, an association founder, told the group landlords must pay \$50 per unit to register, and pay that fee again annually. Any landlord found in violation can be charged \$300 per day, he said.

Recalling an overcrowded Sumner Street apartment building recently inspected by town officials, Hentz said he understood the town's concerns about health and safety. But he questioned the burden the penalties could put on landlords.

"It's kind of draconian, I think," Hentz said. "I wish it was something that was maybe a little more graduated."

While Hentz said town officials told him they may not levy the \$300 fine if landlords are cooperative in addressing problems, some at yesterday's meeting said they would like to see that language included in the bylaw.

Others questioned paying the registration fee annually, while some who live out of town said they knew little about the new bylaw.

Robert Burns, who said he has rented out properties in Milford and Hopedale for nearly 30 years, questioned the measure altogether, saying state sanitary code already addresses how many people can live in one place.

Burns said his own family lived all together in one home when they first immigrated to the area.

"We probably wouldn't be here today if it wasn't for the immigrants who came to this town...and did the very same thing they're trying to outlaw now," Burns said.

Along with about 15 Milford area landlords and other interested people, the meeting drew Sherri Way, president of the the MetroWest Property Owners Association, and Mark Leger, president of the statewide Massachusetts Rental Housing Association.

Way told the Milford association it must find out what it must do to comply with the new bylaw, then approach town officials with their concerns. She said other towns, including Framingham, are looking at similar legislation.

"You've got to be vocal," Way said. "This group is a great start."

Timpany said the landlords could work on proposals to solve the town's apartment concerns with "better interest to protect us."

Leger said Milford's landlord group would be the 24th to join his umbrella organization.

Julie Lioce, another Milford association founder who works for Lioce Properties, also gave a brief talk on new requirements that rental units have carbon monoxide detectors within 10 feet of bedrooms.

Landlords also discussed how the new group will operate, with plans to elect a board of directors and start a Web site.

The landlord association plans to charge \$75 for a single membership, and is scheduled to meet next May 18, at 7 p.m., at the Birch Street Fire Station.

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