

## Council to consider hiking relocation fees

Costs could double for property owners



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COUNCIL HEARING: City Councilor Josh Zakim, seen in his office yesterday, says Boston faces 'a crisis of affordable housing.'

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By: Donna Goodison

The City Council will debate whether to further protect displaced renters whose units are being converted to high-priced condominiums or cooperatives by doubling the relocation fees that property owners are required to pay them.

Fees would increase from \$5,000 to \$10,000 for elderly, disabled and low-income tenants, and from \$3,000 to \$6,000 for others, to bring them in line with increased housing costs since their adoption in 2004, according to City Councilor Josh Zakim.

"It's really to protect long-term renters when a building is converted from rentals, which is happening more and more," Zakim said. "They haven't been raised in 10 years, and I think it's pretty clear that not only have housing costs in Boston risen dramatically in those last 10 years, but they've exceeded the rate of inflation."

One large Boston residential property owner, City Realty Group, says the proposed increases go too far. The company owns more than 600 residential units.

"The relocation fees have remained the same for a long time, and we feel that a moderate increase would be appropriate," said Matt Whittemore of City Realty. "Doubling the relocation fees does seem a bit excessive."

Zakim said the fees are not a "significant" cost for landlords, and the city wants to create housing opportunities for all residents — including those who have lived in units for years and can't pay \$500,000 or more for a condo.

"The reason why the state Legislature authorized cities and towns to put (the fees) in is there is a crisis of affordable housing — that's clear," Zakim said. "We saw that from the mayor's release of his housing task force report and just what we hear from constituents and advocates every day."

Still, he said, the fees are only a small solution.

"Solving the housing crisis in Boston is going to take a lot more than this," Zakim said.

The ordinance, which exceeds state regulations, applies to properties with four or more units, and outlines the required notice to tenants. Adopted in 1999, it requires reauthorization by the Council every five years.

"The current legislation expires on Dec. 31, so if it's not reauthorized by then, these tenant protections will go away," Zakim said.

The council's Committee on Government Operations will hold a hearing on the issue on Thursday.

"There continues to be a need for this, because we continue to see clients that are faced with displacement — both with new situations that happen as well as people who were supposed to be protected by the law but had owners who were trying to get around the law," said Mac McCreight, a senior attorney in the housing unit at Greater Boston Legal Services, which worked with city councilors on the proposed revisions.

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