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MONMOUTH

City might push to make renters aware of rights

Proposal would put a flier in utility bills to detail procedures

By DAN DE CARBONEL
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The city of Monmouth will consider an effort to improve awareness of renters' rights by placing a flier with complaint procedures in utility bills in the fall.

The idea came after a tenants' rights group said it found that most Monmouth renters aren't aware of their rights.

Online

For information, go to www.ci.monmouth.or.us or www.wou.edu/admin/mitu/index.htm.

MITU was founded in 1998 by WOU students concerned about the quality of rental housing available in Monmouth.

Mayor Larry Dalton said that he expected the council to agree to the request once the details are worked out.

"I think the biggest problem for renters is education," Dalton said. "As a city, our problem isn't addressing rental complaints, it is knowing about the problem."

City Manager Jim Hough said Thursday that the city receives a handful of complaints each year.

"Really, not that many complaints have come in," he said.

"But I don't know if it's that there aren't complaints or renters don't know the procedures,"

Another factor is that renters could be fearful of being evicted, Hough said.

In 2002, the city and MITU put together a flier — available at City Hall — detailing renters' rights and complaint procedures. Still, MITU members say most renters don't know what to do if they have a problem with or a complaint about their rental units.

"It's 50-25-99," Gevas said.

"Half of the city's population

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rents, half of those have problems with their rental housing and 99 percent don't know their rights."

Census 2000 data show that of the city's 2,757 housing units, 1,480 are rented and 1,277 are owner-occupied.

WOU professor Peter Calero, the MITU faculty adviser, said the city's response to renters' concerns has been positive but slow in adjusting to the changing demographics of the city.

With such a large portion of the town's population not owning homes, Monmouth could do more for renters, including adding a part-time rental-housing officer, he said.

City procedures require tenants to document their complaints and require the landlords to remedy problems within 10 days. Landlords who do not respond within that time are to be reported to building inspector Larry Thornton.

"The real issue is enforcement," said Calero, a 20-year resident of Monmouth. "It places the burden of proof on the tenant to be the enforcer. The advantage the tenants' union has is that it gives us power."

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