Oft-criticized landlord gets board approval

By Jenn Abelson
GLOBE STAFF

SPOTLIGHT FOLLOW-UP

The city's Licensing Board gave approval Thursday to one of Boston's most notorious landlords to house international high school students attending CATS Academy and referred questions about the landlord's criminal history to the Boston Police Department for further investigation.

The board's decision came just days after a Globe report detailed how Anwar N. Faisal did not have the proper license to operate a dormitory for the high school students at 1110 Commonwealth Ave. in Allston and then failed to disclose, as required, his criminal record on a license application submitted last week after the Globe contacted the school.

"We don't have the capability to determine if he has a criminal record," Suzanne Iannella, one of the city's licensing commissioners, said at a board meeting Thursday.

Faisal, who largely caters to student tenants in Boston and was among the subjects of a Globe Spotlight Team investigation last month, did not appear at the meeting. Faisal was sentenced to 10 months probation in 1995 after pleading guilty to four counts of making false statements to a federally insured bank.

He did not disclose the felonies on the application. He left the section blank that stated, "I have no record of criminal convictions in any state or federal court except those as listed below."

The document was signed under "the pains and penalties of perjury."

The application states that any untrue statement means the license will be canceled or revoked or both.

Robert L. Allen Jr., a lawyer representing Faisal, wrote in an e-mail to the Globe that Faisal misread the instructions about reporting his criminal history and "corrective measures have been taken. . . . He has nothing to hide and will continue to work cooperatively with all city and state agencies."

The property at 1110 Commonwealth Ave., known as Nora's House, was licensed as a dorm for the New England Institute of Art, but those students moved out last August.

Students attending CATS Academy has been living in two of the seven stories in the building whose façade Boston University considered structurally unsound when it sold the dorm to him in 2006.

Faisal has also been leasing units in the Packard's Corner building to other tenants in violation of local regulations, and that arrangement was detailed in a lease agreement with CATS academy that Faisal attached with his application.

But the Licensing Board said the only item on Thursday's agenda involving 1110 Commonwealth Ave. was strictly technical: the change in name from New England Institute of Art to CATS Academy and nothing more.

Licensing rules require dormitory licenses to be renewed annually; each license is for a specific educational institution, and rooms in the dormitory are not to be leased to members of the public or students from other educational institutions except with special permission, say officials from the city's Licensing Board.

CATS Academy, which is operated by the Cambridge Education Group, based in Britain, hired consultants to inspect the property after the Spotlight Team report detailed squalid conditions at many of Faisal's properties around Boston.

CATS Academy said it is enlisting structural engineers to help it evaluate 1110 Commonwealth Ave., whose façade appeared to be separating from the building when BU decided to sell the property. BU officials said it appeared at the time to be a very costly potential repair.

Inspectional Service records reviewed by the Globe do not indicate structural repairs to

Nora's House since Faisal bought it.

Students at CATS, which stands for the College for Arts Technology and Science, moved out last weekend for the summer and "will not move back in until our consultants complete a full assessment of the premises and are certain that the property is fully compliant with applicable laws," Nancy J. Sterling, a spokeswoman for CATS Academy, said last week.

Mayor Martin J. Walsh of Boston, who vowed to crack down on scofflaw landlords with $300 daily fines and increased inspections after the Spotlight series, acknowledged concerns with Faisal's business practices.

"We absolutely have concerns over the issues raised in recent Globe reports around this particular property owner," said Walsh spokeswoman Kate Norton.

"We are taking aggressive and concrete steps to address the broader issue of absentee and irresponsible landlords, including exploring our options for enforcement in specific cases such as this one," Norton said.