

Amity looks to enforce safe rental properties

By Denise Larive, For 21st Century Media

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Amity Township's Board of Supervisors will begin working on a new ordinance that will regulate and ensure that rental properties in the municipality are safe for human habitation.

Following the report by township Manager Charles E. Lyon that a four-unit rental property at the Douglassville Hotel has a leaking roof and an unpaid sewer bill of \$6,697, Supervisor Richard L. Gokey said the township should institute annual inspections of all its rental units.

"I really believe we need some kind of inspection -- sort of like we do for our septic system," said Gokey.

"It's a way to keep people safe," said Solicitor Joan London.

Supervisor Terry L. Jones, who is employed by the Borough of Pottstown, said the borough's policy is to inspect once a year or every time there's a rental change.

"As supervisors, it's our job to protect people coming into our township as renters," said Jones, adding that the township can also inspect for illegal sump pump tie-ins to the sewer system, and also check that all units have working smoke detectors.

The board will begin by reviewing other municipalities' rental property ordinances such as Lower Alsace and also Union Township, which has a Use & Occupancy inspection and permit policy.

"The township should do door-to-door basement inspections for illegal storm water connections," said Lyon, which is allowed for through another of the township's ordinances.

"We do have a right to do that," said Gokey, "and if we're not allowed in the homeowner pays a double fine." The board also unanimously approved a \$1,000 sewer reconnection fee.

Township staff will draft letters to notifying property owners of their delinquent sewer accounts that are subject to disconnection.

Board members and Lyon said the disconnection of a property's sewer deems it "unfit for human habitation" and occupants must then vacate the property.

The board also voted unanimously to support legislation for the use of Pennsylvania municipal police departments to use radar for speed enforcement.

"I am certainly in favor of local municipalities using radar, but how much will this cost us the individual municipalities to install?" asked Gokey.

Amity Township Police Chief Kent A. Shuebrook said hand-held units cost about \$1,000 each, and the township wouldn't need more than two units.

The cost for a fixed-base unit with antennae costs approximately \$2,500.

"Traffic enforcement is about changing behavior -- and once people know that you have radar...", said Shuebrook.

Currently, only the state police are permitted to use radar.

Shuebrook said it is untrue that local municipalities will make money by using radar for speed enforcement.

He said officers' salaries, their time to issue a speeding citation, combined with the possibility of appearing in court, results in a maximum revenue of about \$25 per speeding citation.

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