

A special meeting of Bloomsburg Town Council was held Monday, September 20, 2010, beginning at 6:02 p.m. in the social hall of the Bloomsburg Fire Department, 911 Market Street, Bloomsburg, PA to discuss the possible implementation of an inspection program for all rental units. Present were Council Members Diane Levan, Paul Kinney, W. Carey Howell and William Kreisher; Town Administrator Carol Mas; Code Enforcement/Zoning/ Planning Officer Ed Fegley; Assistant Code Enforcement/Zoning/ Planning Officer Ralph Magill and Administrative Assistant Christine Meeker. Absent were Mayor Daniel Knorr; Council Members Sylvia Costa and Kathy Shepperson.

Vice President D. Levan explained the purpose of the meeting and that Council wanted an open dialogue of the inspections of all rental units. She expressed that this is only the beginning of many discussions to follow on the subject.

E. Fegley cited statistical data for the Town – 9,372 households; 3,003 rentals; 1,602 owner occupied dwellings. The Town wants health and safety standards for all.

Matthew Zoppetti, 143 West Main Street, is in favor of the inspections. There are many dangerous units. It is time to bring them up to the same standard that is provided to students. The initial inspection may be problematic, but if the rentals are updated routinely, the inspections are nothing. The inspections have helped rid him of problematic tenants by providing proof that damage was not done prior to their occupying the unit.

Donna Laubach, 377 East Fifth Street, inquired as to how often the inspections would occur. D. Levan answered that it may be every two or three years. Mrs. Laubach asked about the charcoal grills on porches of student rentals. They create a fire safety hazard.

William Laubach, 377 East Fifth Street, rents to tenants that qualify for HUD and HUD does the inspection.

James Appleman, Jr., 225 West Third Street, has rented for 50 years without any involvement from the town. Why now? Mrs. Appleman is against intrusion by the government. Our apartments are very clean. When their area was re-zoned they were not grandfathered in as far as renting to students. You can make more money renting to students.

Sara Laidacker's family has been renting for 70 years at Jefferson Street and Pine Avenue. Why doesn't the town just concentrate on the troubled units? They were not grandfathered in either which would have made it permissible to rent to students. She is not concerned about property values, but rather the loss of her freedom. She has never needed a permit to rent. The town may start with a few rules but they become more rules over time.

Jim Davis, 579 West Main Street, worries about everything that is going down on landlords, higher flood insurance, increasing real estate taxes, and now this. What about the tenants that disable the smoke alarms? E. Fegley said that the tenants are fined. Mr. Davis had spoken with W. Kreisher during the past election who had agreed that government goes too far. W. Kreisher recently had a personal experience looking at the substandard housing in Bloomsburg and is in favor of the inspections. J. Davis reminded everyone that rents will go up to cover the inspections. Rents that people cannot afford to pay and cosmetic repairs that the landlords cannot afford to make such as painting the outside or installing a new roof. He asked if we wanted to look like Berwick or Mount Carmel who have blighted properties and an inspection program.

Larry Long, 575 West Main Street, does not want to pay for anything. The rental unit has been in his family for 100 years.

Kathleen Black, would agree to voluntary inspections. How many inspectors would the town need; what would their qualifications be and how much would it cost the town?

Nicole Pagliaro, 400 East Second Street, asked if the town considered an incentive for voluntarily complying. She believes it is an intrusion of her privacy for the government to come into her apartment.

Dick Shoemaker, 152 Derrs Road, Benton, keeps up his rentals better than his own home. His family has owned the homes for 100 years. Mrs. Shoemaker commented that you cannot get blood out of a stone.

Fred Reck, 37 Rarig Road, Catawissa, supports the rental inspections. He has both student and non-student rentals and has seen unsafe rental units. Adding the inspection of non-student rentals will provide a more even playing field for tenants. We will all pay if the fire department is called out to a fire.

David Spiwak, 603 East Fourth Street, knows that calls are made to the Code Office now when there is a problem and the problem gets handled. Why do we need an ordinance when BOCA codes already apply to everyone? They just need to be enforced. There are many owner occupied structures that are unsafe. No one disagrees that health and safety is a concern. HUD inspects a large portion of the rentals in question now. He argued that the RRU inspections do not allow for any exceptions or variances. You can be cited for a dirty carpet. You can't regulate behavior.

Joe Gushen, 150 West Second Street, Mount Carmel, and others were against the inspection of rentals in Mount Carmel at first but after a few years bad landlords went away and the properties were sold to people who fixed them up and increased the rent. It was not a bad move for Mount Carmel and he believes it will work the same here.

Joanne Huntington, 126 Iron Street, Berwick, owns property in Berwick and is part of the landlord's association lawsuit against the municipality regarding the legality of their rental inspection ordinance. It is still in the courts.

Eric Bower, 350 East Third Street, was just approved by HUD. The inspection was relatively painless and suggested the town look at a similar process. The recent apartment fires have been unregulated units. There hasn't been a major fire in student rentals since the RRU ordinance was enacted. Landlords need to be held to a higher standard. Mr. Bower was proactive and replaced the wiring in his rental. He didn't need an inspection to be reminded that it had to be done.

Vince DeMelfi, 6005 Columbia Boulevard, has both student and non-student rentals. He has no problem with safety issues. He does have a problem with making cosmetic repairs such as a stain on the ceiling, peeling paint on an attic window, and a dirty carpet. He also has a problem with the RRU fees that went up over 50%.

Pat Mohr, 534 Millville Road, doesn't want anything to happen to the tenants. She feels this is just a way for the town to get their foot in the door.

Susan Helwig, 415 East Main Street, Catawissa, understands that landlords are held to a higher standard but why is it necessary to have two outlets in a bedroom which is a requirement of the RRU inspections.

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 7:30pm.

CAROL L. MAS
Town Administrator & Secretary