

CATAWISSA BOROUGH COUNCIL MEETING
Wednesday February 5, 2020 – 6:00 P.M.

CALL TO ORDER:

- The meeting was called to order by Council President Doug Krum.
- The pledge of allegiance was recited.

ROLL CALL:

- Present were: Larry Kopp, Doug Krum, Gina Trapani, Victoria Waugh, Corey Yule, Janel Patel.
Absent was Roy Klinger, AJ McKenney.

GUESTS TO BE HEARD:

- Guest Sue Helwig spoke on behalf of some of the landlords and tenants in the Borough of Catawissa regarding the proposed Rental Ordinance. Ms. Helwig gave the following issues the landlord group has with the proposed ordinance:
How a landlord and tenant are treated differently than home owners
The Rental Ordinance survey and the results of the survey
The cost to the Borough for implementing the rental ordinance with administrative work, inspections, a fulltime code enforcement officer's salary and benefits.
- Guest John Panko expressed his concern with the cost that will be involved for a landlord if the Rental Ordinance is passed. His cost concerns were the landlord would have to raise rent and you won't get renters, renters already here will move out and this will cause vacant properties. Mr. Panko suggested a Quality of Life Ordinance instead of the Rental Ordinance.
- Guest Juanita Bulliner stated she felt she was not treated appropriately by Borough Manager Larry Kopp and Code Enforcement Officer Randy Howell when they investigated her living situation in a travel trailer inside a pole barn. Ms. Bulliner stated she denied them access to her property and when they left, she felt everything was ok. Then Adult Protective Services was called on her. Ms. Bulliner stated she then came to the Borough Hall for a meeting and Mr. Howell made comments about her mental state because of how she was living. Mr. Howell also threatened Ms. Bulliner with animal control. Ms. Bulliner stated she told Mr. Howell she didn't like to be threatened and Mr. Howell responded with "that was not a threat it is a promise". Ms. Bulliner stated she felt very disrespected with the insinuation of her having mental issues.
- Guest Landlord who did not state his name asked who inspired this ordinance. Councilwoman Victoria Waugh and Council President Doug Krum stated this was brought up before. Ms. Waugh stated she brought the ordinance up again because she doesn't feel safe here anymore and she grew up in a community that had a rental ordinance and feels it is a good idea. Ms. Waugh gave an example of what happened at a rental property next to her home and in conclusion stated that she feels there is a need for a rental ordinance. Ms. Waugh stated this is just her opinion and she is only one person. Ms. Waugh commented she thought the meeting was so landlords could bring a proposal for council to consider to come to a common ground. Many guests stated what they bring is that they feel the ordinance should be dropped. Some guests stated they weren't at the first rental ordinance meeting and are here now listening.
- Guest Michael Swartzlander felt it is very important for Council to remember they work for the community, not to tell the community what to do. Council is supposed to work with the

community and do what the community wants. Mr. Swartzlander stated Council has heard from the residents at several meetings saying they don't want this.

- Council President Doug Krum asked Guest Sue Helwig if she had anything for council. Ms. Helwig stated she feels the point Council is not hearing is the group looked at what the rationale was behind this. They feel the ordinance is unnecessary. All the things in the rental ordinances are already in ordinances of the Borough. She doesn't feel it is the job of this Council to attend to the whims of one or two people. Ms. Helwig touched on the percentages on the rental ordinance survey.
- Guest Landlord who did not state his name asked if the codes we have are enforced. Council President Doug Krum admitted the Borough is behind on enforcing the codes now and the Borough is working on taking care of that. Landlord's suggestion was to come up to speed on enforcing the codes already in place. Council President Doug Krum stated we are working on enforcing the codes. Landlord stated Council is moving too fast and too far and can't handle what they have.
- Guest Cindy Edwards suggested hiring someone for zoning that is certified. Ms. Edwards stated the Zoning Officer Randy Howell is going into properties and inspecting properties and he is not licensed to come into anyone's home. Borough Manager Larry Kopp stated Randy is authorized to go into homes, he does not have the certifications. The law in Pennsylvania states you can either have someone on your staff or hire someone to do inspections. In the last 3 or 4 months the Borough has hired Building Inspection Underwriters to do all code inspections. If Randy comes upon something, he can't handle he calls in Building Inspection Underwriters to do the inspection. Ms. Edwards asked how are they supposed to know what he can handle. Mr. Kopp stated by law that is authorized and that is what the Borough is doing.
- Guest Sue Helwig stated she does not believe he is authorized to go into any houses.
- Guest Colleen Hulse asked if the Borough will be going into all residents' homes. Council President Doug Krum stated an ordinance has not been adopted yet so a decision was not made yet. Ms. Hulse asked what are your intentions. Council President Doug Krum stated we didn't discuss it yet. Council Vice President Corey Yule stated he feels everyone should be treated equally homeowners and rentals
- Guest Sue Helwig stated that is what we have been trying to say that everyone be treated the same.
- Guest Gary Roberts asked if there will be a base line of what the Inspector is looking for when doing an inspection. Mr. Roberts expressed his feelings that every resident should have a document with a base line of the inspection.
- Guest Sue Helwig reviewed the document that she gave to Council and the Borough Manager of what the landlord group came up with. Please see attached document A1.
- Guest Kevin Ferris commented what is the difference if criminal activity is from a home owner or landlord/tenant property. They are going to get arrested but what does that have to do with me. Mr. Ferris also expressed how hard it is to evict a tenant.
- Guest Becky Schleider Assistant Manager of Riverview Apartments asked Council if the residents of Riverview would fall under the rental inspections. A few guests commented it better.
- Guest Dave Blass expressed if we both come to some agreement on the proposals that are present and if the codes already in place are enforced for a year and if we work with each other maybe there will be no need for a rental ordinance.
- Guest Ralph Schumacher read some history on our founding fathers intending government to leave us alone. Mr. Schumacher feels the ordinance is obtrusive and an unnecessary burden. Mr. Schumacher also gave some history on the government regarding Ms. Bulliner's situation.
- Guest Nicole Slusser wanted to go on record saying a lot was discussed here but a pole barn rental is something separate from real estate rental and we want to make sure those two areas don't come together.

- Guest Sue Helwig expressed her concerns with Council doing the Stakeholders survey and rentals was not identified as a priority. Ms. Helwig expressed it didn't make sense to her for Council or the landlord group to spend time on the rental ordinance when there were other things that were listed as a priority. Ms. Helwig feels there are so many people in the Borough that would like to see the Borough move forward.
- Chief Laidacker gave statistics for the increase in crime. Guest Nicole Slusser asked if he could identify the percentage of the crimes that are homeowners. Chief Laidacker replied yes, they had 1 arrest for a homeowner in 2019. Chief Laidacker stated he is not pointing the finger at renters he is just saying the crime rate is skyrocketing. Chief Laidacker said what they are looking for is for everyone to work together and breath some life into the borough. Guest Mike Swartzlander asked if all the arrests were included in the statistics. Chief Laidacker said yes, the increase in crime percentages included all arrests.
- Guest Kevin Ferris asked how drug arrests had anything to do with the rental ordinance. Mr. Ferris commented it is apples and oranges here.
- Guest Alicia Hollingshead stated Benjamin Hollingshead was her grandfather. He was out walking every day and knew everyone in town. Everyone knew every cop so if there was an issue the people knew who to get ahold of. Ms. Hollingshead expressed people feel they don't know the cops and don't feel comfortable going to the cops anymore. Ms. Hollingshead feels the cops and maybe the borough people need to get out to meet the people.
- Chief Laidacker stated he just wanted to give statistics on what he is personally concerned with.
- Guest Colleen Hulse asked Chief Laidacker how do our statics compare to other places with a rental ordinance. Chief Laidacker replied he does not know he is just giving what he has seen in the last 20 years.
- Guest Teresa Andress expressed her concern on how the Borough is going to handle a rental ordinance when they are behind on enforcing the ordinances they already have. Council President Doug Krum and Councilwoman Victoria Waugh stated the Borough is going to try to get another Code Enforcement Officer.
- Guest Sue Helwig expressed if the code enforcement officer would be doing his job there wouldn't be issues.
- Guest Colleen Hulse asked if Council was going to be taking a vote. Council President Doug Krum stated no not tonight.
- Guest Gary Roberts expressed his feelings regarding if the Code Enforcement Officer would be doing his job it wouldn't matter whether it is a rental or home owner property.
- Guest Wayne Levan asked how many electric bills are mailed each month. Secretary Connie Cole stated between a 1000 to 1025 depending. Mr. Levan expressed how he felt about the base rate on electric being raised when it was spoken that was not going to be done. Council President Doug Krum stated it was done due to a short fall on the budget. Many guests commented this is what will happen if this ordinance is passed.
- Guest John Creasy asked what Council is actually hoping to gain from this ordinance. Council President Doug Krum stated they want to clean up the town.
- Guest Sue Helwig expressed a rental ordinance is not needed for this. Just enforce the ordinances the borough already has.
- Guest Nicole Slusser asked Chief Laidacker how he makes most of his arrests. Chief Laidacker explained resident tips are huge because the police cannot be everywhere. Ms. Slusser feels if Council would do something to get residents more involved, they may feel more comfortable reporting a crime. Chief Laidacker offered to start back up a

crime watch if residents were interested. Chief also offered to speak to anyone at the station or at their home if they wanted to talk.

- Council President Doug Krum made an announcement that Council will be going into an executive session after the meeting to discuss Personnel Matters.

ADJOURNMENT:

- Motion to adjourn made by Victoria Waugh, 2nd by Corey Yule. All Aye

MEETING ADJOURNED.

Submitted by:

Connie M. Cole
Secretary

RECOMMENDED SOLUTIONS

Based on these items, Landlords have the following recommendations:

1. Landlords will advise current tenants of their ability to contact the Catawissa Borough Office if they have unresolved complaints with their landlord related to their health and safety.
2. Landlords will agree to put a clause in all new leases advising tenants of the Catawissa Borough Code Officer's phone number in the event they have health and safety complaints that are not resolved by the Landlord.
3. If the Code Officer is contacted by a tenant regarding an unresolved safety or health issue, the Code Officer should verify that the complaint was lodged by the tenant with the Landlord. When the Landlord is notified by the Code Officer of the complaint, the Landlord can advise the Code Enforcement Officer of steps taken to resolve the issue. If there is no plan in place, an inspection of the property can be scheduled by the tenant.
4. Landlords will provide to the Catawissa Borough a list of their rental properties and a contact phone number and email address for the person able to address any code issues. The Borough should use both methods to advise landlords of any identified issue and the Landlord will be required to advise the Borough of their plans for addressing the issue.
5. Landlords identified by the Catawissa Borough as unable to be reached and/or who do not resolve 3 or more issues within a reasonable time will be required to appoint a property manager who can be responsive. "Reasonable time" is determined based on the severity of the issue. Landlords have the same amount of time to respond to an issue as a homeowner.
6. The licensed code officer should use the current ordinances to address any issues with rental properties for the next year. If this occurs and problems remain unresolved, the landlords agree to revisit this issue with the Borough Council in one year.
7. Any police calls or zoning officer calls reported at the monthly Council meeting should be identified as either home-owner occupied or landlord-owned/tenant-occupied property. A landlord representative will be appointed to attend each meeting for the purpose of identifying problem properties/landlords.