

**AMBLER BOROUGH COUNCIL MINUTES
PUBLIC MEETING: FEBRUARY 13, 2008**

A **special public meeting** of Ambler Borough Council was held Wednesday, February 13, 2008 in Borough Council Chambers at 122 E. Butler Avenue, Ambler, PA 19002 at 7:00 p.m. **to discuss solutions for overcrowding and related issues having a negative impact on residential neighborhoods.** President Tony Isabella presided.

Present were Mr. Isabella, Mrs. Pieri, Mr. Kenney, Mrs. Baigis, Mr. S. Pasceri, Mr. Amento and Ms. Maxion. Mayor Wahl, Solicitor Bresnan and Mrs. Aversa also were present. Mr. Dooley and Mr. G. Pasceri were absent.

Discussion began with Ms. Maxion asking what constitutes a family. Mr. Bresnan responded that currently such a unit need not be related by blood or marriage, but must conduct themselves like a nuclear family, “breaking bread” together. A family is not a number of transients under one roof by circumstance. Mrs. Pieri asked whether the Borough could limit the number of people who live as a family, as is done in college towns. Mr. Bresnan responded that the Borough could update its ordinances. Further, he stated that density provisions exist in national building codes and that Code Enforcement could issue administrative warrants.

The issue of lack of available parking was discussed in depth. Mr. Bresnan stated that the Borough could not favor owner over renter in the allowance of or issuance of an allotment of parking spaces per dwelling unit. Eydie Marincola of 329 Edgewood Drive stated she thought she remembered years ago that a duplex was allowed 1 ½ cars per footage frontage. Joe Mastromatteo of 216 Rosemary Avenue stated he did not want commercial vehicles with advertising allowed on Ambler streets. Mr. Bresnan stated that the Borough has laws on trailer limitations and weight restrictions, but does not preclude every type of work truck. He added the Borough cannot regulate the “content” on the side of a vehicle. Cheryl Casalnuovo of 265 E. Park Avenue urged that Borough Police be more proactive and aggressively run the license plates of vehicles that appear to be unregistered or not driveable. She encouraged residents to more actively come forward with their concerns about vehicles that do not belong in the neighborhood. Mr. Isabella stated that last month three cars had been removed. Mrs. Maxion asked an open question as to whether the community should consider a “Community Watch” program.

Concerning property maintenance and overcrowding, Mrs. Casalnuovo stated that the Borough now runs a Code Enforcement Hotline which concerned citizens are encouraged to call. Mrs. Aversa stated that “Hometown News” would highlight that the hotline is in operation and offered that the hotline also would be mentioned on the Borough’s website. Mrs. Pieri suggested that the hotline option be moved up on the recording sequence at Borough Hall.

Referencing the Code Enforcement Department, Mrs. Aversa stated that the Borough has a new Code Enforcement Officer (Mr. Ron Myers, Sr.) who is quite responsive to

enforcement issues. Mrs. Baigis stated that on November 30, 2004, prior to Mr. Myers' tenure, she had an issue in her neighborhood where no action was taken by the Code Enforcement Office or the Police Department.

In defining directions for Council to take on the issues of overcrowding and property maintenance, Mr. Bresnan pointed out that actions cannot be directed solely against all renters and that Council cannot presume that renters are worse than owners per se.

Regarding Council's intention to enforce Use & Occupancy permitting and inspections, Elizabeth Russell of 326 Valley Brook Road stated her concern that Council might be considering U&O inspection for all property sales, i.e., private, owner-occupied single-family dwellings. Ms. Russell stated she did not feel that the Borough has adequate infrastructure to require inspections for all real estate transactions. It was stated that at this time Council is inspecting U&O ordinances, permits and fees for residential rentals only and for buildings for commercial and industrial use, but reserves the right to revisit the issue regarding requiring U&O permits for all real estate transactions. Mr. Bresnan stated that regarding Council's review of permitting fees, such fees must be revenue neutral.

Mr. Bresnan advised that Council's remedies include ordinance amendments and zoning changes. Ordinance amendments can be quite detailed and tailored to meet specific problems. He clarified that relevant Borough ordinances incorporate by reference BOCA Property Maintenance Codes and International Building Codes. Zoning changes would involve holding public hearings. He again stated that the existing building codes, if enforced, provide enough of a hammer for Code Enforcement Office to produce administrative warrants. Danele Herron of 10 Hendricks Street asked whether the Borough has the manpower for such enforcement. Mr. Bresnan responded that the Code Enforcement Officer needs input from Borough staff and Borough citizens, a complaint to act on and cooperation with the police department. Additionally, Ms. Herron stated that the Borough has too many rental units and that Council should look to towns such as Pottstown who provide incentives for owner-occupied units. Mrs. Baigis offered that the Collingswood community is another success story. Mrs. Aversa stated the Borough had successfully countered Montgomery County's "fair share" initiative by citing that the Borough met or exceeded the County's quotas for low income and rental housing.

Council concluded that at its next meeting a date would be set to hold a public hearing to further explore the nature and extent of crowding and neighborhood issues. The special meeting was adjourned at 9:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Elizabeth Russell
Administrative Assistant Water Department
for
George W. Benigno
Borough Secretary