

## Bridgeport Amends Rental Measure

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**By: Keith Phucas  
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BRIDGEPORT - Borough Council amended an ordinance governing rental properties that would make it easier to crack down on unsafe or overcrowded residences.

On Oct. 24, council voted to adopt a measure requiring landlords to register and maintain housing units and permits borough officials to inspect properties to check for compliance with municipal safety codes.

"We'll have a better idea of what's going on," said councilman Pete Kohut. "It more a public safety issue than anything else."

Currently, about half of housing in Bridgeport is rented.

The rental registration measure authorizes Bridgeport's police, fire officials, code enforcement officer or the director of public works to enforce the ordinance.

The multifaceted measure is expected to help borough officials better address overcrowding.

"I think any ordinance we put in place is to meant to make enforcement easier and more manageable," Kohut said.

The part of the ordinance governing occupancy limits is based on the 2003 International Property Maintenance Code.

According to the maintenance code, a bedroom occupied by one person must have at least 70 square feet of floor area.

For a room that sleeps two, at least 50 square feet of area for each tenant is required.

Also, houses must have bathrooms with running water and showers, according to the code.

Also Oct. 24, Bridgeport adopted a controversial ordinance banning illegal immigrants from renting or working in town.

Though the rental measure could be construed as a method of singling out illegal immigrants living in overcrowded conditions, Kohut said the ordinance applies equally to all rental tenants no matter their ethnicity.

"Nothing we do is targeted toward any group," he said. "It's for the betterment of the town as whole."

According to the new rental ordinance, owners not living in rental properties are required to appoint "agents" who must live within a 10-mile radius of Bridgeport.

Also, landlords are held responsible for arranging pest control, cleaning, repair work and snow removal.

At Tuesday's meeting, council approved three amendments to the ordinance.

The first ensures Bridgeport is excluded from any waste removal contracts involving rental properties.

The second requires landlords to apply for rental registration by Jan. 1, 2007.

The third amendment mandates that rental licenses expire on Dec. 31 of each year and requires the borough's Code Enforcement Office to mail renewal applications on or before Nov. 1 of every year.

The borough could begin enforcing the rental ordinance by mid-December, according Sal Bello, Bridgeport's solicitor.

Last summer, the city of Hazleton and New Jersey's Riverside Township passed measures banning illegal immigrants from renting or working in their towns and prohibited employers from hiring undocumented workers.

Bridgeport Borough Council first proposed its illegal immigration ban in August.

It is a violation of federal law to knowingly harbor, house or hire illegal aliens, according to United States Code, Title 8.

The American Civil Liberties Union of Pennsylvania filed a lawsuit against the city of Hazleton on behalf of immigrants living there alleging the city's ordinance is unconstitutional.

Also, the ACLU claims in its suit that Hazleton's ban conflicts with Pennsylvania law governing the authorities granted to municipalities under the Home Rule Charter Law and the Landlord and Tenant Act, and violates the federal Fair Housing Act.

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