

Language Tweaking Needed for New Fire Safety Ordinance

By Karen Gould

A misunderstanding over code compliance requirements stalled the adoption of a rental housing inspection and licensing ordinance during the Mackinac Island City Council meeting Wednesday, March 29, sending the document back to committee for language tweaking before Council adds the regulation to city books.

The housing inspection, which is being required by the proposed ordinance before businesses can be licensed by the city, is intended to address fire safety issues in buildings used to house visitors and employees. The ordinance is designed to protect the city, visitor, employee, and the property owner, said Alderman Mike Hart.

Language contained in the ordinance left some business owners of rental housing units confused. They argued that the proposed ordinance could cost them thousands of dollars by requiring them to meet current building codes.

"This was not intended to be a building code inspection, never was," said city building inspector Dennis Dombroski. "The fire department is going to be the lead on it."

Council apologized that Fire Chief Dennis Bradley could not attend the meeting to provide details on the inspections.

Mr. Dombroski said the ordi-

nance addresses National Fire Protection Association Life Safety Code, rather than building codes. He explained that rental units in operation already were inspected for building code compliance during their construction, remodeling, or change of use.

This new ordinance will focus on fire safety issues like making sure emergency doors are not locked, exit sign lights are working, doorways and stairs are not blocked, smoke detectors are placed properly and working, and gasoline is not stored in housing units, said Mr. Dombroski. He noted that the inspection also would involve common sense fire safety issues.

Alderman Smi Horn agreed. "This is to help enforce state law," he said, and explained that the Insurance Services Office, Inc. of Illinois, is coming back to reclassify the city. The company is hired to inspect codes for insurance companies.

"If we don't have good ordinances for fire protection, our classification for insurance is going to go up again, and it's going to cost us a lot of money for higher insurance payments," he said.

"It's been noted by legal counsel that, without something like this, we are, as a city, naked," said Mr. Hart, suggesting that the city could face charges of negligence if it does

not have a fire inspection program. He said other area cities have adopted similar ordinances.

"We seek only to enhance protection of the public and solidify the protection of the city and the taxpayers," he explained.

Business owners also were concerned with the cost of inspections and that the ordinance would generate negative newspaper headlines raising issues of fire safety.

Mr. Hart replied he'd prefer to see the headlines read, "Mackinac Island strives to make the Island safer" than "Mackinac Island didn't do a darn thing."

"I think that you have a valid point there, but are you going after it with an atomic bomb or something more reasonable?" asked Frank Bloswick owner of LaChance Cottage.

Referring to business owners' concerns over the cost of inspections, Mayor Margaret Doud explained that license fees would help cover those costs. She said the fees are not excessive, and that the intent of the lower fee structure was to encourage cooperation between businesses and the city.

Inspection fees include \$25 for units with up to 20 rooms, \$50 for 21 to 40 rooms, \$75 for 41 to 80 rooms, \$100 for 81 to 100 rooms, and \$150 for 101 rooms or more.

Business owners also asked that the language of the ordinance be made clearer before it comes back to Council for a vote.

Mr. Hart reminded attendees that the ordinance is a legal document and will be written by an attorney.

"We can get it as close as

common sense can make it, and then the law kicks in," he said.

The ordinance also will require that business owners place on file with the city a floor plan that depicts relevant information, such as the location of stairwells, electrical rooms, and elevators. The document would be an asset for firemen and could be used during emergency evacuations and medical emergencies.

In other business, Council made the assistant to the mayor a full-time position at the request of Mayor Margaret Doud. Kelly Bean has held the job since January 2005. The position carries a salary of \$26,000 a year and a contract will be written when the city attorney returns from vacation, explained Mayor Doud.

Payment of \$11,450 was approved for Wolverine Fireworks of Kawkawlin for the Island's July 4th fireworks show. The city already had made a \$2,500 deposit for the display and was given a \$1,050 discount by the company.

On a recommendation of the finance committee, the city will pay Ray Card of Mackinac Island \$1,700 to update maps he created last winter for the emergency departments to include the new 911 addresses. The project is expected to be completed in June.

A contract was approved by council to purchase flowers for planting on city owned properties saving \$4.45 per flat over last year's costs. S and S Lawn Care of Mackinac Island will provide the flowers for \$9.50 per flat.

Council denied a renewal of a temporary motor vehicle permit for a Skytrak vehicle to be used by Prestige Construction Group of Traverse City. The

company is the contractor for Tom and Sally McGovern's single family home at Forest Ridge and had requested a two-month extension on its current permit. The request was denied because council members are concerned that it would set a precedent for using such equipment for house construction, especially into the summer, even though the neighborhood is isolated.

"This isn't a hotel they're building, this is a single family residence," observed Alderman Jason St. Onge.

A request for three temporary motor vehicle permits was tabled. Phil and Lee's Homes of Wells made the request for Monday, May 8, for the Al Hagar home in Stonecliffe Manor I. Council wanted to contact the company to see if the work could be done sooner.

Approval was granted to Michael Benjamin to use the city street and right of way to remove and replace sections of the sidewalk and install a new water line to his Huron Street residence.

The Department of Public Works was given a temporary motor vehicle permit to replace two valves at Biddle Point and to rebuild a pump at the wastewater plant.

Edison Sault Electric Company was given a temporary motor vehicle to remove equipment in the Stonecliffe area.

A temporary motor vehicle permit also was given to Mission Point Resort to move an employee off the Island. The moving van is required to arrive at the Beaver Dock and can not leave Mission Point property.

Grand Hotel received two temporary motor vehicle permits for a lift to perform maintenance and painting of the hotel. Mr. St. Onge, the painter, abstained from the vote.

Belonga Plumbing and Heating of St. Ignace received two temporary motor vehicle permits, including a backhoe, to move Phil and Lee's Homes trailer from Stonecliffe Manor III to British Landing, and to use a New Holland Skidsteer to remove concrete from the Lake Huron side of the Iroquois Hotel.



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Zoo-de-Mack Bicycle Tour Set for May 20

The 17th annual Zoo-de-Mackinac Bicycle Ride is set for Saturday, May 20, and anyone who wants to participate can register through the date of the event.

The ride is a 51-mile scenic bicycle tour from Boyne Highlands to Mackinac Island. Some 2,000 riders are expected to participate in the ride at their own pace along US-119, overlooking Lake Michigan. The event has raised more than \$10,000 for the Top of Michigan Trails Council and its efforts to build and improve recreational pathways in northern Michigan.

The event includes a pre-ride party, with live music and a finish on Mackinac Island. More information is available at www.zoo-de-mack.com.