

Politics and Economics

No decision reached on rental regulations

by Shawn Christ

The State College Borough Council recently considered regulating what are commonly known as “football rentals” but could come to no conclusion.

Issues about the rentals, also known as occasional residential occupancies, ranged from effects on neighborhoods to tax equity in a report written by the former State College Assistant Manager Thomas Kurtz.

He recommended council should consider a licensing process that would require a homeowner to apply for a license for this short term rental.

“I was pleased with the background he provided and the conclusion he came to,” said State College Borough Council member James Rosenberger.

Football rentals have become a cottage industry in State College. Terry Williams, Borough legal counsel, noted rental ads in newspapers, Craigslist and several websites as evidence that these rentals are increasingly common.

But Kurtz’s report pointed out the difficulties in regulating football rentals, a finding to which community members could attest.

“I think that people are more concerned about the issue of the proliferation of these,” said Donna Queeney, president of the College Heights Neighborhood Association. “I get the feeling that the

report is really saying that this is a hard thing to enforce and can we really enforce it.”

Rosenberger said safety issues were a definite concern.

“Football rentals are a person’s private home, which don’t have to be inspected for code, such as fire exits and fire alarms,” he said. “So there’s an over-hanging issue of safety.”

College Township Manager Adam Brumbaugh said he thinks that “safety is the primary issue.”

“The intermittent rentals, or football rentals, present a life-safety issue from the standpoint that these are typically units that are being rented to folks that are from outside of the area,” he said. “The units themselves are not subject to any of the normal rental inspections and to any of the normal life-safety procedures that exist for normal rental units.”

Safety inspections wouldn’t be the only requirement if a regulation system were put into place.

“There’s also a question of tax equity. This is somebody who is doing this and, in some respects, can be considered to be operating a business,” said Brumbaugh.

Rosenberger had a slightly different view on taxing the football rental properties.

“That’s not a tax we are concerned with,” said Rosenberger. “My objection



Photo by Shawn Christ
Stone Glenn Apartments undertakes short term leases for people who wish to remain in the State College area for the duration of a football season. Stone Glenn is fully regulated, unlike private homes.

stated at the meeting was that we don’t do that for other home industries and this is kind of like a home industry.”

Borough Council member Peter Morris took issue with a possible registration system.

“A registration system would miss a lot of them,” said Morris at the meeting. “If that happens, you have a real issue of fairness.”

But even if the process of establishing a registration system is difficult, Queeney said “it’s not impossible.”

“I have a lot of confidence in the borough staff. I think they’re wonderful,” she said. “But before it gets any worse, we need to control it.”

Queeney said that people who rent properties for a weekend “have no bearing of responsibility or concern for the neighborhood” because “they don’t think of it as a residential neighborhood.”

“I think it is part of a larger issue,” she added. “I think it is part of the need to essentially reclaim our neighborhoods.”

Individuals who rent properties through PSUFootballHouseRentals.com are warned about obeying the local laws where their rental is located, according to Mike Doyle, founder of the website.

“The contract states that the renters must comply with all local laws and regulations, and failure to do so means that they would be held accountable for any ramifications,” he said.

Although Doyle believes “that people should be free to rent out their personal homes for short-term rentals, like football weekends,” he also said that “if the borough did begin to regulate the process, however, we would do whatever we could to help our homeowners comply with the regulations.”

Rosenberger said that while Kurtz did a “thorough” job on the report, “it’s not an urgent issue in my opinion.”

The State College borough council voted to send the issue on football rentals to a work session in February to discuss it further.



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Proposed community center sparks debate

by Sean Flynn

The Ram Community Centre, as it is currently planned, will be a 52,000 square foot complex in Penns Valley. It will include a YMCA, a Mount Nittany Medical Group office, and a senior citizens center.

It will all be run by the Ram Centre, a non-profit organization established to administer the complex. The organizers hope to raise \$1.5 million to commence groundbreaking and an additional \$2 million after that. According to its website, it won't cost taxpayers a dime.

But some Penns Valley citizens say they are concerned about the Ram Centre's plans to lease Penns Valley Area School District (PVASD) property for the new complex.

Ann Stapleton is a founding member of the Penns Valley Community Action Group, which has posted signs throughout the community. They oppose the Ram Community Centre's construction on school property, and accused the complex's supporters of running a "propaganda campaign" in its support.

Stapleton says the PVCAG is circulating petitions in which the group demands a halt to the community center plans. She says they've collected "approximately 500 signatures" from people opposing the center.

PVCAG members highlight concerns about the center, including its potential burden on the school system and the services it provides. Stapleton said that contrary to the Ram Centre's claims, the PVASD has already spent taxpayer dollars on the Ram Community Centre.

"The people I know who oppose the RCC are opposing it because they do not want it on school property," Stapleton wrote in an email. "The PVASD is not able to provide any guarantee that the taxpayers will have no financial, civil or criminal liability."

Penns Valley Area School District board president Sal Nicosia chalked up much of the opposition to communica-

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tion problems.

"Maybe we didn't do a good enough job doing getting the information... to the community as a whole," said Nicosia.

The PVASD has spent money on the Ram Community Centre project, he said, but the district is being reimbursed by the Ram Committee, an interim group managing the Ram Centre's creation. Thus, he says, there are "no net expenses."

When asked about liability concerns, Nicosia said the PVASD will be protected by the contracts it has signed.

"That's one of the reasons we did a straight-out land lease," he said. "We are responsible for only the things we come to contract with. The building itself will be the responsibility of the Ram Centre."

"The District requires that the Ram Centre carry full liability [insurance], and the district will be carried as an additional insured. Even if the [Ram Centre] fails to pay its mortgage, the bank that's going to hold the note. It will be their responsibility to take care of the building."

Stapleton's group also brought up conflict of interest issues.

"We feel that it is an ethics violation for [PVASD board members] Chris Houser and Allan Darr to be sitting on the PVASD school board and the RCC board," Stapleton wrote in a statement provided to Voices. "We also feel it is a conflict of interest for [Superintendent of Schools] Brian Griffith to be on the fund raising campaign."

"Unless I yell fire in a crowded building, or put out the word that I'm going to cancel the football team next fall, it really is very difficult to get people to tune in. [Then] all of a sudden something happens, and they're like 'Oh my god, how did I not know about this?' Well, when's the last time you went to a school board meeting?"

Nicosia said the school board's role in the development of the Ram Centre was essentially finished with the signing of the lease. The true test of community support would be whether the Ram Centre receives the \$1.5 million in donations required for groundbreaking.

"The only thing you can do to stop this thing," Nicosia said, "is don't contribute to the fund drive!"

But the PVCAG isn't giving up.

They have passed out more than 150 lawn signs and plan to continue collecting petition signatures in an effort to force the Ram Centre or the school board to halt the project.

"The community has the right to recourse," said Stapleton.

Nicosia said the school board was open to hearing the complaints captured in those circulating petitions but that the petitions hadn't yet been submitted to the board.

The school board wouldn't act, he said, "until we get those petitions. Then we'd have to have a discussion."

In response to those concerns, Nicosia said the PVASD had checked with legal counsel before proceeding.

"The whole organizational structure of what has been put together and the dealings that the board have had doing what we do [have] been vetted by our counselor for the district," said Nicosia. "There is no monetary gain by any of us, whether we sit on one board, the other board or both at the same time."

Stapleton's group admitted that after consulting with their own legal counsel, they hadn't found any basis for legal action.

"We couldn't find it yet," said Jonathan Gillan, a PVCAG member.

But Nicosia admitted that the board has struggled to effectively communicate with the community throughout the eight years he has been a member. He attributed much of the perceived failure in communication to low attendance at school board meetings.

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Deutschworks: America the reality TV show

by Steve Deusch

Steve Deusch is a regular satire columnist for Voices.

Stevieslaw: So You Think You Have Talent.

Smokey Diamond and I were sitting at the local University Starbucks last Wednesday morning discussing Nietzsche's Übermensch and how the concept might apply to the future Republican Presidential Candidate—be it Mitt Romney or Newt Gingrich or, for that matter, Michelle Bachmann.

The wager was that whichever one of us broke up and sprayed coffee through our nose first, paid for snacks.

At the table behind us, a group of four was discussing with some solemnity the loss of Chris, as opposed to Mitch, Marge or Phillip, on the TV Reality Show—So You Think You Can Yodel.

The people at the table in front of us were busy discussing the proposed merger of American Idol with Project Runway, vis-à-vis the future of fashionable music. And although Smokey and I could be said to have little idea of what we were talking about, it seemed to us, that ours was the least bizarre of the three conversations.

Welcome to America in the 2010's, where reality TV is boss. A recent study found that Americans are watching 42

hours of reality TV a day—on an average of 8.34 screens per household.

No wonder the birthrate in America is dropping like a rock—although people are certainly watching, “So You Think You Can Get Pregnant,” on Fox.

Clearly, if it weren't for the sale of big screen TV's and television service, we would have no economy at all.

There are problems ahead, however, associated primarily with the answers to the twin question of how can you keep up with reality and how can you plan ahead for it.

Therefore, we are as pleased as Matthew on “So You Think you have Good News (8PM Tuesdays on ABC),” to announce the Less-Intelligent-than-average American Guide to the future of reality TV—“So you think you have talent.”

In the Guide, you will first learn some reality history.

Did you know, for example, that Ray Bradbury believes he will never be able to atone for his novel “Fahrenheit 451,” a book often credited with the birth of reality television?

He often says as much as the host of the popular you-are-going-to-hell show, “So you think you are hot now (1a.m. Weds on ESPN2).”

In LAG you- will learn that, although the “whole” life shows will continue with titles like “Real Husbands of Topeka,” and an exciting new “cousins”



Photo by Steve Deusch
Steve Deusch in his original native habitat of New York City.

series—you won't believe the insights produced by the show “My sister-in-laws second cousin was Barack Obama's barber.”

Most new shows will highlight Talent (yes, with a capital T). Here are just a few of the hundreds discussed by LAG in incredible detail:

So You Think You Are Charming—in which contestants will vie for the title of “Snake Charmer Extraordinaire,” with guest appearances by Bernie Madoff, Donald Trump and Karl Rove. Trust us, the auditions for this show, involving hundreds of “wannabes,” cobras and cameras, is mind blowing. Will there even be a winner?

So You Think You Are Decisive—in which carefully chosen contestants will take to sea in command of a “boomer” submarine armed with multiple nuclear tipped missiles. What will they do when the command to fire—real or imaginary—comes in? Will the final contestants choke and mistake the code for Tehran with the one for Islamabad? How many Americans will know the

difference? Hunker down in your bunker and watch them live on the DIY network.

So You Think You Can Fly—in which completely untrained contestants will vie for the chance to fly a fully loaded passenger aircraft from Chicago to Osaka. Sully Sullenberger and the former head of the FAA Randy Babbitt will judge (think good judge, inebriated judge), as the flights get longer and more technically difficult.

In one episode, the contestants even try to get in and out of Philadelphia International Airport—a task most experienced pilots refuse to attempt. And get this, at no time during the flights will the passengers be told that their flight captain is completely unqualified to fly the aircraft. Best book your flight insurance now!

Finally, the guide will be the first to inform you (and this is quite a sneak preview here) that the entire 2012 Presidential Campaign and Election will be run as the reality show, “So You Think You Can Govern**.”

Just imagine—campaign contributions and countless attack ads will soon become a thing of the past. Lobbyists will lose much of their influence.

The candidates will be asked probing questions by a team of responsible journalists—chosen from all political stripes—about foreign and domestic affairs, the military, the economy, and the social safety net, while as many as two hundred million Americans look avidly on.

On several of the shows, viewer questions will be entertained.

And on Election Day, we estimate that fully 96 percent of eligible American voters will cast their votes by phone or on the internet to elect the next president.

Stay ahead of the future of reality. Buy your guide today. Only \$19.95 wherever LAG guides are sold.

**Just kidding about this one. No such show is planned.

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