

Suburban REALTORS® Alliance News Brief Headlines

Scroll down for full text of articles

General

- Fair Housing guidelines are important to remember
- State may require inspection of septic systems
- Septa renames regional rail lines

Bucks

- Yardley Borough enacts occupancy and inspection ordinances
- Plumstead residents concerned about well water contamination
- Pennel to consider mandatory sewer inspections at point-of-sale
- Preserved land added to Cooks Creek watershed
- Springfield to form economic revitalization committee

Chester

- Coatesville seeks accountability for vacant homes
- Residents ask Phoenixville to maintain street trees
- Hearings scheduled on Coatesville water rate hike
- Tredyffrin to consider regulating student rental housing

Delaware

- Delaware County foreclosure program receives yearlong extension
- Chester Heights surveys reviewed
- Darby Borough sets public hearing for zoning changes
- Norwood officials remain quiet over firing of building inspector

Montgomery

- Pottstown closer to finalizing water shut off procedure for rentals
- Construction begins after THP bankruptcy settlement approval
- Well pollution discussed in Limerick
- Jenkintown debuts online reporting for public issues
- King of Prussia Business Improvement District closer to reality

General

Fair Housing guidelines are important to remember

Hank Lerner, Esq., PAR director of Member and Legal Services, said, "REALTORS® need to keep in mind that while race and disability are the protected classes most people think of, there are other protected classes under the Fair Housing Act and families with children are an example." The Fair Housing Act prohibits housing discrimination based on race, color, national origin, religion, sex, familial status and disability. It is illegal to deny housing to families with children under 18 years of age unless the housing qualifies as "housing for older persons." Consumers who believe they are victims of housing discrimination can file a complaint with the PA Human Relations Commission within 180 days of the alleged act. If the allegations are covered under federal law, PHRC will file the complaint with the appropriate federal agency. Consumers can also contact HUD directly at 800-669-9777 (voice), 800-927-9275 (TTY). [Click here](#) for more.

Source: PAR Just Listed; 8/12/2010

State may require inspection of septic systems

Municipalities across the state that are updating their sewage management plans have a new worry these days. It's whether the state is going to require them to take a more active role in monitoring on-lot septic systems or require that septic systems be routinely inspected. Many townships do not require homeowners to perform any maintenance on their on-lot system and do not keep track of maintenance records. The state Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) has been working for the last five years on revising regulations that govern on-lot septic systems. The new regulations, if they are approved, will go beyond encouraging municipalities to have a septage management plan. Municipalities will need to know the elements of newer septic systems and ensure they are working properly.

Source: Daily Times; 8/9/2010

Septa renames regional rail lines

In an attempt to make regional rail travel easier to understand, SEPTA has renamed all of its regional rail lines. The previous name once had an "R" before a number to indicate the train's destination – for example, the R6 would run to Norristown. Now the R6 has been renamed the Norristown Line. [Click here](#) for a message from SEPTA about the changes.

Source: Montgomery Life; 7/28/10

Bucks

Yardley Borough enacts occupancy and inspection ordinances

Yardley Borough recently enacted several ordinances that will impact real estate transactions. The ordinances require smoke and carbon monoxide detectors; chimney caps; sidewalk inspection and move in/move out permit. Please contact Yardley Borough at 215-493-6832 for specific information about these ordinances prior to the sale of any property within the borough. The Suburban Realtors Alliance will meet with borough officials to discuss the impact of these ordinances.

Plumstead residents concerned about well water contamination

Over 100 Plumstead residents attended a meeting with the PA Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) to discuss the possible contamination of their well water. The meeting was organized by State Sen. Chuck McIlhinney and State Rep. Marguerite Quinn. The well water on Ann Drive has been tested and found to contain benzene, a known carcinogen. The contamination is believed to have originated due to water runoff from a June 29 fire in an industrial building located at 5189 Stump Road. Over 3 million gallons of water was used to douse the fire that burned for a week. The DEP has ordered the owner of the building to drain two detention ponds on the property, as the contamination is believed to have traveled down a drainage ditch that was an overflow for the ponds. Bucks county health officials initially declared that there was no contamination in the wells. The next step is a temporary water supply to be set up by the DEP Hazardous Sites Cleanup Program and the continued testing of the water supply. Plumstead supervisors are urging residents to regularly test their wells and not wait for a crisis situation. Please visit the [Plumstead Township website](#) for updates on the water contamination and DEP actions.

Source: The Intelligencer; 8/4/10, 8/5/10 & 8/11/10

Penndel to consider mandatory sewer inspections at point of sale

Penndel Borough recently announced that they are considering an ordinance that would require an inspection of the sewer lateral on any property for sale in the borough and prior to finalization of the sale. Sewer laterals on private property are owned by the property owner and Penndel has begun an aggressive search for "inflow and infiltration" into the borough sewer system after receipt of several large bills from the Bucks County Water and Sewer Authority. Penndel recently hiked rates by 49 percent to cover an estimated \$99,000 budget shortfall for sewage treatment.

Source: Bucks County Courier Times; 8/12/10

Preserved land added to Cooks Creek watershed

Bucks County Commissioners recently approved a natural areas grant that will allow Springfield to preserve another section of the Cooks Creek watershed. The 55 acre property on Drifting Drive includes approximately 30 acres of forest and 25 acres of hayfield. It sits in one of Bucks County's high priority natural areas. The township open space program, created three years ago by voter approval, will fund the second half of the development easement funding for the property.

Source: The Intelligencer; 7/29/10

Springfield to form economic revitalization committee

Springfield Township supervisors approved the formation of an ad-hoc committee to look into economic revitalization for Springtown, Pleasant Valley and Zion Hill. The Springtown Study Ad-hoc Committee is made up of one Springfield supervisor, a planning commission member, a historical commission member and a member of the business community. The focus of the group will be to gather public input on how to encourage small business growth in the Route 212 area and search out funding opportunities for revitalization. Some ideas proposed included an ice cream shop and general store.

Source: The Intelligencer; 7/29/10

Chester

Coatesville seeks accountability for vacant homes

After a year's moratorium on registration charges for vacant properties, city officials plan to discuss reinstating the registration fee during council's regular meeting Monday. Two years ago, the city passed an ordinance requiring the owners of a vacant property to register it with the city. The cost for registration is \$250, but last year, the city voted to waive the fee. In addition, according to Karl Marking, city council vice president, some concerns arose regarding how fairly the statute was administered. A vacant property is defined as one in which no one resides for more than 60 days, but city officials have acknowledged that legitimate reasons may exist for a property to be empty. The ordinance may be amended after council discusses it. Damalier Molina, urban planning and codes director, is hoping that the fee will be reinstated, partly to help pay for a new codes enforcement officer. Molina estimated 125 to 200 properties are vacant in the city. The primary purpose of the registration is to make it easier for the city to hold property owners accountable, officials said. Suburban REALTORS Alliance staff is meeting with the Coatesville codes department early next week; please submit any comments to esmist@suburbanrealtorsalliance.com.

Source: Daily Local; 8/8/2010

Residents ask Phoenixville to maintain street trees

The Phoenixville Shade Tree Commission heard from nearly 20 residents regarding trimming issues and the possibility of the borough turning tree trimming back over to homeowners. Commission member Paul Kusko told the audience that the borough is dealing with budget issues. Currently, by ordinance, the Borough of Phoenixville is responsible for the care and maintenance of regulated street trees, including the removal of those that are dead, dying, and/or hazardous. Amid tough budget conditions this is one borough service that is being considered for termination for the upcoming fiscal year. This would shift the responsibility of the maintenance and removal of regulated street trees back to the homeowners of properties abutting the right-of-way where the trees are located. Over the past four years the borough has been spending \$40,000 to \$80,000 per year on regulated street tree maintenance and removals.

Source: Daily Local; 8/11/2010

Hearings scheduled on Coatesville water rate hike

The Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission said Friday it has scheduled two hearings to receive public comment on the proposed rate increase by Pennsylvania American Water Co. Coatesville Wastewater Operations. The meetings will be held at 1 p.m. on August 24 in Council Chambers of Coatesville's City Hall and at 7 p.m. on August 24 at Rainbow Elementary School (1113 W. Lincoln Highway). More information on the ratemaking process is available on the Commission's Web site at www.puc.state.pa.us. Coatesville's Wastewater Operations provides service to about 6,035 customers in the city of Coatesville, Parkesburg Borough and West Sadsbury, East Fallowfield, Caln, West Caln, West Brandywine, Valley, Sadsbury and Highland townships. Members of the public are invited to attend the hearings and provide comments. Customer testimony will become part of the record on which the utility commission will issue its final decision.

Source: Daily Local; 8/6/2010

Tredyffrin to consider regulating student rental housing

The Tredyffrin Board of Supervisors will consider two ordinances that would regulate student rental housing in the township at their August 16 public meeting. A proposed property registration ordinance for student rental housing would require the registration of student contact information with the township. The ordinance places a limitation on the number of student tenants living in a home to three. It also provides for minimum distances between student homes. The Suburban REALTORS Alliance has been closely monitoring the progress of this ordinance. [Click here](#) to read the summary for each ordinance. Please contact esmist@suburbanrealtorsalliance.com with any questions or comments.

Delaware

Delaware County foreclosure program receives yearlong extension

Delaware County's foreclosure program has received a yearlong extension until July 30, 2011. This year, 2,410 sales have been reported, according to Delaware County Sheriff Joseph F. McGinn. McGinn said the increasing sheriff's sales are "reflecting the economic times that the country is going through right now." Total sheriff's sales amounted to 2,373 in 2007, 2,190 in 2008 and soared to 3,862 in 2009. The program was instituted by the court in 2010 to permit homeowners who have been served with mortgage foreclosure complaints from lenders to seek counseling from Consumer Credit Counseling Service of Delaware Valley. The service will assign a housing counselor at no charge to homeowners. If a homeowner qualifies for participation in the program, a counselor will contact the lender and stay any action for 30 days. To participate in the program, the property must be owner-occupied as the primary residence. Since the program's inception, 28 homeowners have reached some sort of accord with their lenders in the form of permanent modifications of mortgage obligations, trial modifications of obligations or short sales, according to the county. Another 90 homeowners are currently negotiating with their lenders with realistic hopes of reaching some sort of accord short of foreclosure. For more information about Consumer Credit Counseling Service of Delaware Valley, call 1-800-989-2227.

Source: Daily Times; 8/12/2010

Chester Heights surveys reviewed

Chester Heights will reveal information gleaned from long-range planning surveys recently completed by borough residents at the upcoming Sept. 13 borough council session. Council has already started the process of updating the borough's comprehensive plan, but wanted to get the public involved on the ground floor of the multi-year project. According to Councilman Pat Patterson, the input from residents was "impressive" and informative. A town hall meeting is planned for sometime this fall to further elaborate on the survey results, Patterson noted.

Source: Daily Times; 8/8/2010

Darby Borough sets public hearing for zoning changes

Darby Borough's planning commission has prepared a new zoning ordinance with the assistance of the Delaware County Planning Department. The proposed new ordinance aims to strengthen property maintenance codes and direct new commercial and mixed-use development to the Main Street corridor and other areas of the borough. Council will also hold a public hearing regarding the ordinance Wednesday, Sept. 8. A full copy of the ordinance is available online at www.darbyborough.com. Alliance staff has reviewed the ordinance and submitted questions to the zoning board.

Source: Daily Times; 8/8/2010

Norwood officials remain quiet over firing of building inspector

Though many Norwood Borough officials remained mum on the matter, the mid-July firing of Building Inspector Anthony Tartaglia was confirmed July 30. Borough Mayor George McCloskey said Tartaglia was fired after council held an executive session July 14. Tartaglia was fired due to complaints about his accessibility, according to reports. A Montgomery County-based firm with offices in Folcroft will replace Tartaglia. A Uniform Construction Code certified inspector, Tartaglia is also Clifton Heights' acting borough manager.

Source: Daily Times; 8/6/2010

Montgomery

Pottstown closer to finalizing water shut off procedure for rentals

Pottstown is looking to adopt a procedure to shut off the water to commercial and rental properties with outstanding water and sewer bills. Currently, the borough is owed about \$800,000 in back water and sewer bills with about 80 percent of that figure owed by commercial properties or landlords. Development of the procedure has been time consuming due to laws in place that protect a tenant from having their water turned off due to a bill they are not responsible for paying. The tenant will be allowed to pay 30 days of the back payment to keep the water on and open an individual account to continue payment for water and sewer service. By law, the amount paid can then be deducted from the rent payment. Pottstown will begin notifying delinquent accounts in September.

Source: Pottstown Mercury; 8/8/10

Construction begins after THP bankruptcy settlement approval

A federal bankruptcy judge approved a settlement between T.H. Properties and Bank of America which will allow T.H.P. to resume building homes in stalled developments in Skippack and Pennsburg. The agreement will allow T.H.P. to emerge from bankruptcy and pay off creditors. Public improvements should begin in the Biltmore Estates and Northgate developments upon finalization of the agreement. The improvements include grading, seeding and installation of walking trails. Homes left incomplete after the bankruptcy filing will be finished and undeveloped lots will also be built upon under the agreement.

Source: Perkasie News Herald; 7/27/10

Well pollution discussed in Limerick

Taking a proactive stance, PA State Rep. Tom Quigley and State Sen. John Rafferty urged the PA Department of Environmental Protection to hold a briefing for Limerick Township residents to discuss the most recent well contamination in the area. The contaminated area has been labeled the Landis Creek site, and several wells have tested positive for TCE (trichloroethylene) and PCE (perchloroethylene). The DEP Hazardous Site Clean Up team is first testing the wells and providing clean water for residents affected. Then they will determine the source of the contamination. A presentation is available on [the Limerick Township website](#) that includes a map of the affected area.

Source: Pottstown Mercury; 8/5/10

Jenkintown debuts online reporting for public issues

The Jenkintown Borough Public Works department has a new way for the public to report problems in the borough. Residents can report problems such as street light issues, downed signs, potholes or storm drain covers by using an online reporting tool on the [Jenkintown Borough website](#). The form will go into a centralized database and repairs will be dispatched by priority and available resources.

Source: Glenside News; 7/28/10

King of Prussia Business Improvement District closer to reality

The King of Prussia Business Improvement District (BID) in Upper Merion is one step closer to reality after clearing a 45-day objection period with only 9 percent of landowners objecting to the BID creation. The BID will provide businesses within the district a voice with local governments for projects and development. Businesses in the district will be assessed .0089 mills to help fund the organization. [Click here](#) for more information.

Source: The Times Herald; 8/9/10