



Upper Darby considering costly sewer mandates for already stressed homeowners during COVID-19 pandemic

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UPPER DARBY, Pa. — The Suburban Realtors® Alliance (SRA) is urging Upper Darby Township Council to table a proposed ordinance that would require residents to perform costly sewer inspections and repairs when they sell their homes.

Draft Ordinance 3070, which is set for a council vote during an online meeting on April 15, would require home sellers to have a plumber inspect their sewer laterals — the pipes that carry sewage from homes to sewer mains under the street. The proposal is being considered at a time when the township has closed its offices to the public and drastically changed its public meeting procedures in response to the coronavirus pandemic.

“The idea of introducing such an ineffective, but very expensive point-of-sale inspection during an unprecedented pandemic and financial crisis is mind-boggling,” said Jamie Ridge, SRA president/CEO. “Why rush through this major piece of legislation when there are obstacles to public engagement? Why add a new burden on home owners who are already worried about their income and upcoming mortgage payments?”

The Pennsylvania Office of Open Records advisory on coronavirus [says](#), “To the extent that agenda items can be delayed until in-person meetings can resume, it’s a good idea to do so.” The Pennsylvania District Attorneys Association [says](#), “What can happen in the ordinary course of business should happen in the ordinary course of business with full and complete transparency after the emergency has ended.” The Pennsylvania State Association of Townships [says](#), “if the township does not have business that it needs to conduct, then PSATS believes that it would be appropriate under these emergency circumstances to cancel or postpone the meeting.”

The proposed ordinance could deliver a devastating blow to an Upper Darby real estate market already troubled by extremely high local property taxes that have depressed the value of homes compared to neighboring communities. Typical sewer lateral inspections cost hundreds of dollars, and needed repairs can run into many of thousands of dollars.

“Point-of-sale inspections are also a wholly ineffective method of addressing the serious issue the township wants to fix — infiltration of fresh water into the municipal sewer system,” Ridge said. “By only inspecting approximately 1-2% of sewer laterals each year, it will take Upper Darby more than four decades to stop the infiltration of fresh water into the system via residential laterals.”

A smarter, more cost-effective plan would be to first determine whether the issue is being created by problems in the main sewer lines, Ridge said.

The SRA previously submitted comments to Upper Darby Council on portions of the draft ordinance that would violate Pennsylvania Act 133 of 2016. Ridge said that while those legal issues have been addressed, the SRA is strongly encouraging the council to table the proposed ordinance entirely until the state of emergency has been lifted and a more comprehensive solution can be designed with proper opportunities for public comment.

About Suburban Realtors® Alliance

The Suburban Realtors® Alliance is a subsidiary of the three largest local Realtor® associations in Pennsylvania: the Bucks County, Montgomery County and Suburban West associations of Realtors®. Between its three shareholder associations, the Alliance serves more than 12,000 members. For more information, visit www.suburbanrealtorsalliance.com.

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