

Planners eye tighter river regs

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ROMNEY — The Hampshire County Planning Commission last week mulled over a proposal to tighten up rules governing the placement of RVs and/or trailers in flood-prone areas.

Planning official Charles Baker presented a general outline of the present situation where county flood ordinance regulations require RVs and/or trailers in “special flood hazard” areas to be moved every 180 days.

Baker indicated that enforcement of the rule is posing a challenge.

Last week, planners asked Baker to create a draft version of a proposed change to the 180-day rule and have it ready for review by the January meeting.

The change will likely establish a 180-day period where no RVs and/or trailers can be placed along flood-prone riverside campsites.

The period would roughly fall within the winter months. One idea was to have an Oct. 31 to May 1 period.

The new restriction would likely allow for a waiver, wherein an RV and/or trailer could be parked for a short time — for example, during hunting season in November.

The waiver would come with a fee and require an inspection to assure the RV and/or trailer is highway-ready.

Baker said that type of system would be a step forward in addressing the need for adequate and fair enforcement.

The reason for the 180-day provision is to assure that the RVs and/or trailers are roadworthy and can be moved in the event of an on-coming flood.

Baker said all that is required is the RV and/or trailer be moved a short distance to show its roadworthiness.

“Five feet back and 5 feet forward. Or, drive around in a circle. That’s all it really takes,” Baker said.

The problem lies in the present ability of the planning office to oversee enforcement of the 180-day rule.

Baker is the only compliance officer in the two-person planning office.

The other staff person, Amanda Charlton, handles a myriad of office-related and administrative assistant duties.

In carrying out his compliance officer duties, Baker is tasked with administering and overseeing the enforcement of a number of key county ordinances and programs — including the subdivision ordinance, building code and inspection program and floodplain ordinance.

As noted during last week’s meeting, assuring the county maintains its National Flood Insurance (NFI) status is the main point of keeping the local floodplain ordinance in line with federal regulations.

The 180-day rule was a much-debated topic when the county updated the floodplain ordinance in late 2002.

However, the rule was made part of the ordinance because it met FEMA guidelines.

Getting back to the enforcement situation, Baker said it is difficult for him to see that every RV and trailer in recreational river areas is moved.

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