

Why can't NYC do this?

[Creedmoor Civic Association](#) (Bellerose) President Rick Duskiwicz found this program in the Town of Brookhaven and passed it on with the query: "Why can't NYC do anything even remotely like this?" Queens Civic Congress thanks Rick for this "find" and our legislation and zoning and code enforcement committees find the program in Suffolk interesting and worthy of consideration. QCC will take this up with the Department of Buildings and interested legislators. If you find programs and ideas of interest that merit consideration or implement planks of our [CIVIC 2030](#) platform, please share what you find.

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02/06/2008

Crackdown On Illegal Residences Underway

By: Barbara LaMonica

Brookhaven Town law enforcement officials are putting taxpayers' money to work, and appropriating funds to pay investigators overtime to crack down on what some say is a decades-long problem - absentee landlords.

"We have to see how these people are coming and going during early morning hours and late at night, when they leave for work and return home," explained Paul Degen, senior investigator with the Brookhaven Town attorney's office.

Investigators most recently built cases against two absentee landlords, including Paul Fuina, a detective with the Nassau County Police Department's 8th Squad, who owns the house at 49 Parkwood Drive in Mastic Beach. Among a series of building code violations, Fuina was issued summonses for allegedly having an illegal basement apartment equipped with a kitchen and bedroom.

According to Assistant Town Attorney Raymond Negron, the previous owner of the ranch-style house possessed a permit for a legal apartment. Town code stipulates, however, that the sale of a single-family home with a legal apartment would negate the legal apartment status. Any future owner of a home with an apartment must apply for legal apartment status. Furthermore, Negron stated, "the home with a legal apartment is supposed to be owner-occupied."

The lengthy investigation led officials to Fuina's workplace in Levittown, where attempts to bring the property owner into compliance failed. "I tried to get Paul [Fuina] on board to legalize his house," Negron explained. "I called Nassau Police, got him on the phone, identified myself and his property, and asked if he'd be willing to discuss bringing the property into compliance, and he responded, 'I have no idea what you're talking about.'" That led Negron to notify the precinct inspector that, because they did not know where Fuina resides, they would be serving a series of tickets to Fuina at the 8th Squad. At press time, the case was pending in Sixth District Court in Patchogue.

Brookhaven Town Sixth District Councilman Keith Romaine is advocating for the town to create a position for a special prosecutor whose specialty would be, in instances of building code violators, to prosecute cases in court. "I intend to have the town council crack down on illegal rentals and these landlord profiteers who are putting our neighborhoods in danger and hurting our quality of life, by focusing on the town's enforcement on those problem properties," Romaine said.

Meanwhile, Degen noted that another property owner also is facing a series of building code violations. Complaints from neighbors regarding a house located at 37 Maplewood Avenue in Selden led town investigators to build a case against owner Greg Amato who, according to Third District Councilwoman Kathleen Walsh, allegedly is an absentee landlord.

"We received numerous calls on this particular house early in December that eventually led to police issuing a search warrant [on January 22] to gain entry to the house," Walsh explained. "This has always been a big piece of the puzzle we haven't had in the past and now we are able to provide town investigators with the tools they need to get in to see where the violations are. And in this instance there were numerous violations."

Those infractions, Degen noted, include an illegal basement apartment, topped off with a dormer that was illegally constructed as a second story to the house. According to Degen, the top level of the house consisted of a series of bedrooms, each with its own lock that, Walsh and Degen said, turned out to be an illegal rooming house. "There were multiple apartments in the house, and business activity in the rear, and there was an outdoor storage issue," Degen noted. "The house is a giant structure that has a host of illegal activities without [required] variances. There were four exterior electric meters and the house and property were littered with debris."

The county Legislature passed a bill allocating \$90,000 to Brookhaven Town for investigators to work off-peak hours to observe whether owners or inhabitants of homes that were garnering complaints were conducting any illegal activity, explained Suffolk County Legislator Kate Browning (WF-Shirley). Town Supervisor Brian Foley noted that funding trickling down from the county is earmarked for overtime pay in order to "give the law department and town investigators flexibility and the tools to work in the early morning hours, late night and weekends ... Brookhaven Town's law investigators have been stepping up enforcement and taking a proactive approach and we're sending out a clear message" that illegal housing will not be tolerated.

"Our law department is doing a phenomenal job, but there's a process which takes time, where you don't just report a house one day and it's shut down the next day," Foley added.

And, investigators say, their issue is not with tenants, but with landlords who are violating town codes. "The bottom line," Degen stated, "is that the town council wants illegal housing and illegal activity stopped, and residents want action."