

RIVERHEAD TOWN

Building a case against OVERCROWDING

Stricter fines and jail time might await property owners who flout codes

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Riverhead officials are considering new changes in the town code that would levy stricter fines against property owners who commit housing violations, a move some town officials said is necessary to combat overcrowding.

Supervisor Laura Jens-Smith suggested making revisions in late September to Chapter 217 of the town code covering building and housing standards. Among several other changes, property owners could be fined up to a maximum \$10,000 — but no less than \$2,500 — or face 15 days in jail if they don't remedy code infractions within 15 days of being issued a violation.

That proposal, which was debated at a public hearing last Wednesday, could also result in officials revoking a certificate of occupancy if code violations aren't fixed.

"We have found that there are some landlords that abuse our town codes, so we added to the code increased fines to be able to address those issues," Jens-Smith said. "Basically, we're sending the message that we're not tolerating overcrowded housing in our town anymore."

Jens-Smith said code enforcement officials have asked certain landlords to rectify overcrowding issues, to no avail.

Robert F. Kozakiewicz, the town's attorney who also helps the town handle code enforcement issues, said those properties are under investigation and the town could not release any further information on them.

Some have argued that the town lacks the code enforcement staff necessary to enforce such penalties.

At the board's Oct. 16 regular meeting, Councilman Tim Hubbard said code enforcement still



Supervisor Laura Jens-Smith addresses the board late last month.



Resident Stephanie Ranghelli

TIME AND MONEY

- The code revisions also call for reducing the time that property owners who commit housing violations have to come into compliance from 30 days to 15 days.
- The fines issued can be no less than \$2,500 and no more than \$10,000, according to a draft of the proposed legislation.
- An expanded definition of mobile homes is also included in the revisions.
- If there are no strong objections, the board may decide to vote on the legislation between the end of October or in early November, said Riverhead Supervisor Laura Jens-Smith.

ing they were necessary to address overcrowding issues. "It's stronger than the code we have, it's stronger than the state code, and that's what is needed at this time," Kent said. Residents can submit written comments on the proposal until Friday.

needs a full-time notice clerk, at least two more code enforcement officers and a paralegal to handle cases to pursue code violators at the court level.

"We could make it a \$1 million fine, but if we can't enforce it what good is it?" Hubbard said.

Stephanie Ranghelli, a town resident, said that while she feels stronger housing regulations are needed in Riverhead, she questioned why the code changes had not been proposed years earlier and said there would likely be "a big concern

about enforcing them."

"As a community member, I'm fearful of not just the aesthetics of my town, but of the safety and well-being of the people that reside in those homes and their children," Ranghelli said.

Jens-Smith said that the town had added an additional code enforcement officer last year and that she had not heard any requests for more code enforcement officers before then.

Councilwoman Catherine Kent defended the changes, say-

Around LI

\$500G to boost walking, biking

Bay Shore will receive funding from Suffolk County to enhance pedestrian and bicycle access between the downtown area and the waterfront, officials announced Monday.

The Suffolk County Jumpstart Program is awarding the Town of Islip \$500,000 for the improvements. The plan is to upgrade the Fourth Avenue and Maple Avenue corridor for pedestrians and bicyclists between the Bay Shore Long Island Rail Road station and the Maple Avenue dock.

"This truly is a hub," Islip Supervisor Angie Carpenter wrote in an emailed statement. "The Bay-Way Corridor Project connects the Bay Shore LIRR Station to the Great South Bay so very well. The new bike paths, the ADA [Americans with Disabilities Act] ramps, pedestrian lighting and newly paved road have been met with an extraordinarily positive reaction from the community."

— SOPHIA CHANG

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