

Town officials take aim at junk vehicles

Written by KRISTYN HALBIG ZIEHM
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Concerns with aesthetics, environmental hazards prompt Port board to explore ways to tighten regulations

Concerned with aesthetics and potential environmental hazards, Town of Port Washington officials last week began considering ways to beef up its junked vehicle regulations.

“We’ve had some complaints recently,” Town Chairman Jim Melichar told the Plan Commission April 11.

“There’s a farm on Highway H where they’re collecting tractors. They must have 200 along the fenceline. Some people think it’s a nuisance.”

Other members of the commission cited areas along Highway LL and Highway KK where abandoned vehicles can be seen littering the countryside.

While the town code prohibits the storing of junked vehicles, truck bodies, trailers, tractors and appliances for more than 30 days, it exempts farms from that regulation.

“That isn’t right,” Supr. Jim Rychtik, a member of the commission, said. “I’m zoned agriculture. I’m growing corn and raising pigs, so I can park cars? I shouldn’t be exempt.”

Today, farmers have some of the cleanest properties in the township, he noted.

Melichar said his concern springs not so much from aesthetics but from the potential for contamination if oil or gas from these junk vehicles drips onto the land and contaminates the soil and groundwater.

“I know this is going to bite us someday,” he said.

Plan Commission member Dave Murphy suggested the town get rid of the exemption.

“If they have a car they’re just too lazy to get rid of, is that right?” he asked.

But Supr. Mike Didier, a member of the commission, warned that it may not be easy to enforce the regulations.

“If we start to enforce this, are we poking a hornet’s nest?” he asked. “The first guy you drag in here is going to come in with a list as long as his arms of properties with junked cars.”

Rychtik said that isn’t the right reason not to do anything.

“I don’t think we’re saying we’re going to go on a witch hunt,” he said. “But we need a better ordinance so we can enforce it.”

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“If we don’t say you can’t do it, you can’t enforce it,” commission member Randy Noll said.

Building Inspector Rick Fellenz noted some people use old vehicles as art. If the town makes an exception for this, he said, everyone will claim their abandoned vehicles are art.

Although the commission seemed reluctant to take action, Melichar said he expects the Town Board will refer the matter back to the panel for a recommendation.