

Pownal looks to toughen up on zoning violators

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Article Launched: 05/05/2008 03:05:09 AM EDT

Monday, May 5

POWNAL — The Select Board is ready to flex some muscle.

The board allocated funds for the zoning administrator to take legal action against zoning bylaws violators and gave the planning commission funds to pursue an interim bylaw to ban mobile home parks.

"We're trying to address these things in a legal manner. We've always written warnings and visited people but this is a step further than that," said Zoning Administrator Nelson Brownell. "It's basically stepping up the process to more enforcement."

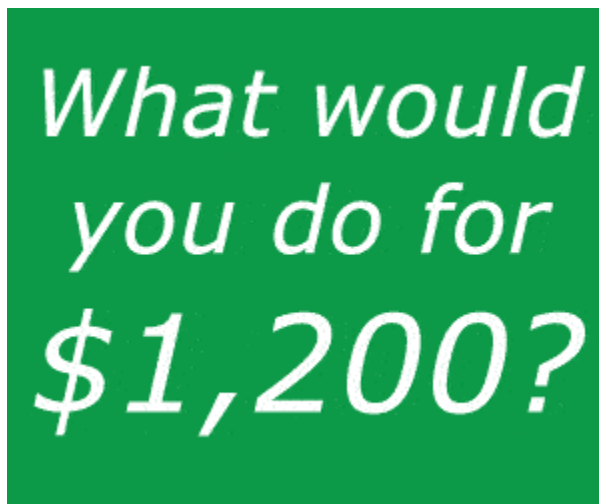
Brownell, who serves as select board chairman, said that during a recent informational meeting, the board heard that the people want to clean up the area. The town has not taken a violation to court in about two years, Brownell said, but, reacting to the resident concerns, it will now.

"I heard, 'let's straighten up our problems.' They are looking for more enforcement," Brownell said. "Now, we need to do more than just talk."

Brownell got the rest of the board's approval about two weeks ago and began preparing to take multiple local residents to court.

"I'm waiting to hear from the attorney to see if we have a good case to take them to court," Brownell

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said. "I'm definitely looking on major highways and some on back roads. We'll go after what we can go after."

On Thursday, the board allocated funds to the planning commission to begin researching what can be done with mobile home parks. Residents have been citing poor living conditions at the parks and advocating to disallow any new parks until the current ones are fixed. The idea led to a town vote but included rejecting recently adopted zoning bylaws and was rejected by voters.

The commission initially attempted to ban new mobile home parks from being built when it updated the zoning bylaws but for fear of legal issues, the select board changed it to allow them only in the village zone. Now, with Select Board approval, the commission will meet with the town's attorney, Peter Holden, to fully understand the legal aspect and find a solution.

"I'm going to try and put him on the agenda for the next meeting," said Planning Commission Chairman Jason Zimba. "We'll learn everything we can about all the options. Mobile home parks are a problem to be solved in Pownal and I don't think any of us are done."

Zimba agreed that residents showed they wanted more enforcement of land use at that informational meeting but dealing with mobile home parks is complicated. With the help of Holden to start the process, Zimba hopes the commission will be able to make a suggestion to the select board on how to handle it.

"I think other people in town want to learn about this too," Zimba said. "We're trying to find out all of the options."