

Butler Eagle 4-9-2025 – Controversial Penn Township Ordinances Tabled After Heated Meeting

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Controversial Penn Township ordinances tabled after heated meeting

William Pitts_Eagle Staff Writer

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A packed house turned out for the Penn Township Supervisors meeting Tuesday, April 8, to debate a set of proposed nuisance ordinances. William Pitts/Butler Eagle

PENN TWP — A large group of township residents piled into the municipal building on Airport Road on Tuesday night, April 8, to voice their frustration with two proposed ordinances regarding blighted structures and junk accumulation.

The supervisors meeting — which typically draws crowds between two and six people, not counting the staff members — was packed to overflowing with residents who came to air their grievances with ordinances that many criticized as vague and potentially overreaching on fundamental rights.

When asked when was the last time he saw that many people gathered at a Penn Township meeting, Supervisor Samuel Ward said, “Never.”

The ordinances — No. 178, intended to address unsafe and blighted structures; and No. 179, intended to address accumulated junk around households — were approved for advertisement after last month’s meeting.

According to township resident Stacy Broskey, negative sentiment spread about the ordinance in the days leading up to the meeting. This included a petition which circulated on [Change.org](https://www.change.org) to rally support against the ordinances and, as of Tuesday night, had gathered 451 signatures.

“Basically, I found out on a Facebook post,” Broskey said. “Friends of mine sent me a message saying, ‘Hey, look at this. If you’re a Penn Township resident, you need to look at this.’”

The board ultimately tabled both ordinances and signaled their intention to do so even before a lengthy session of public comment that occasionally turned heated.

One of the residents who spoke up, Matthew Salina, used the opportunity to promote his campaign for township supervisor while also calling upon current supervisors to take a serious look at the two proposed ordinances.

“While the main the intent to maintain a clear and clean and safe community is commendable, this ordinance could lead to unintended negative consequences that may outweigh its benefits,” Salina said. “We are going to run local families and local businesses out of this township if we adopt these ordinances.”

Township residents raised a series of issues with each ordinance, saying the definitions of what constituted an offense were vague and that low-income residents could be disproportionately punished.

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“The potential for fines and violations could pose significant financial burdens on residents who have limited income,” Salina said. “Families already facing financial difficulties may be penalized for circumstances beyond their control.”

Both ordinances contained provisions that could potentially allow enforcement officers to enter an offending residence “whenever necessary,” which multiple residents saw as potentially unconstitutional.

“The proposed ordinances are, simply put, outright illegal,” said Jonathan Gavin. “They are a slap in the face of the Fourth Amendment of the Bill of Rights. This is the sort of heavy-handedness that our Founding Fathers fought against.”

The most scathing criticism came from Brian Helfer, who questioned not only the ordinances, but not coming up with alternative solutions for waste disposal, such as using community dumpsters or community trash pickups.

“Don’t make a Cranberry out of this place,” Helfer said, to much applause. “You’re not going to survive doing that in this hometown. We will vote you out. This is our home and this is taxpayer’s money.”

As for the future, Ward said, “We will review the information we got today and we’ll do what we have to.”