

October 29, 2008

## Registries of landlords being tried in other areas

*Brian Sharp*

*Staff writer*

Concerns about absentee landlords and company ownership of more rental units have city of Rochester officials looking to create a registry to keep track of who owns what.

The registries require landlords to list contact information and other details. Out-of-area landlords must provide a local contact.

Schenectady created such a registry last year. Brockport and Troy created one this month. Rochester could enact one next month.

"I don't think there is any reason a person should think they have a right to own something, and then hide behind it," said Thomas Richards, corporation counsel for Rochester.

Objections deal with how much information should be made public. If someone puts down his cell phone as an emergency contact, for instance, does that become public record? In Brockport, the registry is limited only to residential properties. In Rochester, it will cover commercial properties as well.

Rochester plans to roll out the registry as part of its inspection cycle, meaning it will take at least seven years for all property owners to register.

Schenectady created the registry a year ago and began sending out letters for landlords to return. The city started with two-dwelling-unit properties, about 60 percent of the city's 20,500 rental properties, and hasn't gotten any further.

"It's very labor intensive. It has pretty much overwhelmed the personnel resources that we have," said L. John Van Norden, corporation counsel for Schenectady.

Rochester has 45,000 rentals. People living outside Monroe and the contiguous five counties own more than 10 percent of them. Similarly, limited liability companies, or LLCs — a hybrid between corporations and partnerships — are the listed owners for an estimated 10 percent.

"As more and more people own these properties in corporate names, you need to identify a responsible party," Richards said. "Our problem is not being able to get ahold of people at all."

In Schenectady and Brockport, and as planned for Rochester, the registry will be available to police and firefighters. If the Fire Department is called out for a gas leak, for example, firefighters can call the owner if no one is home — rather than knocking down the door.

Scott Zarnstorff, Brockport's code enforcement officer, said it was just good customer service. Brockport

has between 600 and 700 residential rental properties, he said.

While most are locally owned, the Village Board was updating its local laws anyway and Zarnstorff thought it best to get a registry started.

[BDSHARP@DemocratandChronicle.com](mailto:BDSHARP@DemocratandChronicle.com)

---