

Press & Sun-Bulletin

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Wood-burner law fuels outrage Hundreds attend Town of Chenango meeting

By Nancy Dooling
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TOWN OF CHENANGO -- Members of the town board met Monday night for their regular monthly meeting, which is normally a quiet affair with routine business efficiently conducted.

Instead, more than 200 angry people showed up, many of them outraged over a proposed town law that would severely restrict the use of indoor woodstoves and outdoor wood burners, as well as provide fines and even jail time for violators.

"I'm in America," said Albert Davis. "I'm not in Iraq."

His comments were echoed by others, one woman telling the board that she'd be the first to go to jail for violating the proposed law.

So many came Monday that only about 100 could squeeze into the meeting room at town hall on Route 12. The other 100 or so waited in lines outside and in the hallway. Board members had to conduct two separate meetings to accommodate the crowd.

Their outrage -- and their numbers -- made a point, leaders said.

"We got the message," said

Supervisor Margaret Turna after listening to a litany of complaints.

She declined repeated requests to name which board member came up with the proposed law, saying it was a joint effort of the four board members and Turna. Not all of them agreed with portions of the proposed law, she said.

The proposed law would actually amend an existing law governing the use of outdoor wood burners enacted in 2005.

The changes call for:

- * Permits to operate outdoor and indoor wood burners in residentially zoned areas of the town. The proposed law doesn't require a permit for indoor fireplaces.

- * All fuels except firewood and untreated lumbers would be banned from burning.

- * Outdoor furnaces would be permitted only in areas zoned agricultural.

- * Owners of indoor woodstoves in residentially zoned areas would have to apply for a permit by Aug. 1. To get a permit, the woodstove must meet U.S. Environmental Protection

Agency standards.

- * Interior woodstoves installed before 1992 must meet federal standards by 2010.

- * A first violation of the law would bring a fine of up to \$500 and a jail stay of 10 days.

Turna and the four board members told Monday's audience they would not vote on the proposed law as it was written and would hold another public meeting -- in a much larger room.

Turna later said she wasn't aware there were so many town residents who used indoor and outdoor wood burners.

Lori Benjamin told the board she'd recently spent more than \$2,000 on a new woodstove -- and checked with town code officials on the installation. She hadn't heard a word about the proposed law, she said.

And town officials should handle complaints about wood burning appliances on an individual level, said Jeff O'Neil. "We don't need laws -- not like this," the town resident said.