

BETHLEHEM CONSIDERS BAN



NICOLE RADZIEVICH/THE MORNING CALL

Bob Rush planted bamboo in his backyard 30 years ago in Bethlehem. He may have to remove some of it under a City Council proposal to restrict bamboo.

Will curtain fall on the 'running bamboo'?

BY NICOLE RADZIEVICH
Of The Morning Call

"Running bamboo" may soon be taboo in Bethlehem.

City Council is considering restrictions on that fast-growing variety that's as strong as steel and can spread like the flu. The woody grass, which some praise as a serene privacy screen, can rip up neighbors' lawns, crack foundations and damage water lines.

City health director Kristen Wenrich, who forwarded the proposal to City Council, said the city has received complaints from a handful of neighbors. One said the bamboo started sprouting in his yard and would cost \$850 to remove, and another \$22,500 to keep out with a barrier and fence.

"The longer you continue to let it grow, the more impact it will have," Wenrich said. "There is not much we can do about it without an ordinance in place."

"Running bamboo" grows in a tall thicket and spreads outward. Another type, "clumping bamboo," gets wider as it grows rather than shooting outward. Clumping bamboo would remain legal to plant.

Owners who already have running bamboo could keep it under certain conditions: installing a physical barrier, and keeping the bamboo at least 20 feet from a property line, easement or public right of way.

First-time violators could be fined \$100 and/or ordered to spend up to 30 days in prison.

Ban being pondered would target fast-growing variety.

Bob Rush planted his thicket of bamboo 30 years ago when he built his handsome bi-level home on Priscilla Lane — the same field where he played pickup baseball games as a boy.

Over the years, the bamboo created a beautiful barrier between his backyard and the alley. It also provides shade to his patio and tomato garden. He faithfully prunes the bamboo from his fence and uses the dead bamboo as stakes for tomato plants. He has given some to a friend, who used it to build a tepee.

But under the proposed ordinance, he would likely have to get rid of it. Twenty feet, he said, is roughly the distance between his patio and an alley, leaving no room for bamboo.

"As long as people keep an eye on it and prevent it from spreading, I don't think it's a problem," he said.

But not all bamboo enthusiasts are so diligent about its maintenance, said city resident Ronald Huber.

Huber bought his property on the city's eastern outskirts 14 years ago, but has come to regret that decision in the last three years

since a neighbor planted bamboo. He said the invasive plant has crossed the property line and he's constantly beating it back. Huber said he has contacted the city, county and state, but that nothing can be done absent an ordinance. He said he'd move, but believes the bamboo impacts his property value.

"I don't enjoy living there anymore," he said.

Amy Korman, an educator at the Penn State Extension office in Northampton County, said bamboo has been an issue across the state.

"These types of plants are truly invasive," she said. Barriers are key for keeping bamboo isolated.

Communities across the country have considered bamboo restrictions. The issue has cropped up in Connecticut, New York and New Jersey. Pennsylvania municipalities have passed similar ordinances in recent years, including in Bucks County.

The Lehigh Valley Planning Commission considers bamboo restrictions a matter of local concern. Bethlehem and Forks Township are among those with bamboo ordinances.

Bethlehem City Council today is scheduled to take the first of two votes on the ordinance.

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INVASIVE LANDSCAPING

Bamboo ban advances in Bethlehem

Council panel votes to prevent new plantings, restrict existing stands.

BY NICOLE RADZIEVICH
Of The Morning Call

A proposal to ban bamboo in Bethlehem could take root as early as this spring.

A City Council committee recommended 3-0 to move forward the ban, which would stop residents from planting running bamboo, the fast-growing variety of the woody grass. Residents who already have stands in their yards would be able to keep them so long as they build a barrier to prevent spreading and keep the plant at least 20 feet away from a property line, utility easement or public right of way. The buffer, health officials say, is needed because bamboo can grow 30 feet a season.

Councilman Bryan Callahan, a member of the community development committee, said he still has some questions about the proposal and left open the possibility of proposing amendments before City Council votes whether to pass the law.

"If I had a property, I wouldn't want somebody planting this ... and it coming onto my property," he said. "But I also understand the economic impact on people who have it."



Bob Rush planted bamboo in his backyard 30 years ago in Bethlehem. City Council is expected to take its first vote on a ban in April.

City Health Director Kristen Wenrich said at least 18 municipalities in Pennsylvania and several states, including New York, have enacted bamboo restrictions. She said she believes the proposed ordinance is the best way to guard against the invasive plant taking over neighborhoods.

She said the city would enforce the ordinance on a complaint basis, requiring the complaints come

from neighbors and not just motorists who pass by the bamboo. She also said the city would give owners time to come up with a plan to get rid of the bamboo that violates the buffers.

First-time offenders would face a \$100 fine and/or 30 days in prison.

City officials say they know of six neighborhoods in the city that have bamboo.

Edwin Rodriguez said he had a property on the South Side where a neighbor's bamboo shot into neighbors' yards, crawling through cracks and openings. He said cutting, spiking and burning bamboo doesn't work.

"I tried everything we know of and still the root system kept on coming," he said.

But a couple of bamboo owners told City Council that bamboo

DETAILS

Proposal: Ban future plantings of running bamboo, place restrictions on owners who already have bamboo.

Penalty: \$100 fine and/or 30 days in jail.

Next step: City Council expected to vote next month.

Source: City of Bethlehem

makes a pretty privacy screen and helps the environment by cleaning pollution from the air and providing shade.

Resident Sloan Wertman asked consideration be given to responsible bamboo owners. She said she grows bamboo on her property that borders Easton Avenue. Since the proposal was released, Wertman said she plans to widen the buffer between her property and her neighbor's from 10 to 20 feet. But she said, she also grows bamboo along Easton Avenue, and she asked that she be allowed to keep that even though it conflicts with the proposed ordinance.

"It is a screen for me where there is considerable noise and dirt," she said.

Council will take its first vote on the ordinance April 4.

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Bethlehem Township considers regulating bamboo growth

"You can control it by mowing and mowing and mowing. Endlessly mowing."

— Emelie Swackhamer, horticultural educator

Experts note the invasive plant is potentially harmful to foundations and pipes.

BY CHARLES MALINCHAK
Special to The Morning Call

Bamboo owners in Bethlehem Township may want to give some thought to the future of their plants because of a potential ordinance aimed at keeping it from growing and spreading onto neighbors' properties.

The township commissioners are set to discuss regulating bamboo Monday night and Commissioners President Martin Zawaski said the discussion has the potential to lead to the introduction of an ordinance.

When not planted within special barriers, the plant is very invasive, which is how it came to the attention of the commissioners at their meeting earlier last month.

During that meeting, Cabernet Road resident Sean Delonas said his neighbor's 7-year-old golden bamboo, known as a running bamboo, is establishing itself in his yard.

He said after the meeting the bamboo covers about 70-square-feet with stalks ranging from 1 to 8 feet high.

Delonas, a former cartoonist for the New York Post, said he approached his neighbor about the invasion and the response was that a barrier was installed and it is being cut-back.

Delonas said the barrier is inadequate because the plant's rhizome root system is growing over and under it.

"Regardless of the commissioners' decision, I'm hoping my neighbor could work

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BAMBOO

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with me to eradicate it or put up a barrier. If we wait five years, it will be a nightmare," he said.

That nightmare, he said, would be the plant getting to his home and damaging the foundation and underground pipes.

"If I have to put a barrier around the house it could cost \$15,000," he said.

A prepared statement

from the American Bamboo Society (ABS) about the plant's invasive nature said, "If you plant bamboo you are responsible for its care ... The ABS recommends that running bamboos be planted within a barrier and that you strongly consider this for any bamboo planting."

The most effective barrier is one made of high-density polyethylene followed by ones made of concrete, according to the ABS, and should be 28 inches below ground and at

least 2 inches above ground.

If bamboo needs to be removed, the ABS statement said, "the only truly effective way to get rid of it is to dig it out."

Delonas' problem agitated Commissioner Mike Hudak, who said, "We don't need an ordinance to control plants. If you have a problem, dig it up."

He noted other invasive plants in the township, such as purple loosestrife and Norway maples, saying, "So do we create an ordinance to cut down all the Norway maples?" "If there's definite harm

we need to do something about it. Bamboo is a different animal all together. I know how it grows," Zawaski countered.

Emelie Swackhamer, a horticultural educator of the Penn State Extension Service for Lehigh and Northampton counties, said unchecked bamboo is a problem throughout the Lehigh Valley.

She said that while it can be a beautiful plant, she echoed the ABS, "You have to be a responsible bamboo owner."

Barriers are essential, but she said other methods of control include herbi-

cides and cutting it. "You can control it by mowing and mowing and mowing. Endlessly mowing," she said.

At least 17 municipalities in the state have bamboo ordinances, including Douglass Township in Berks County and Tinicum Township in Bucks County.

The state Department of Conservation and Natural Resources has placed golden bamboo, a native of China introduced to the U.S. in 1882, on its watch list of invasive plants.

Charles Malinchak is a freelance writer.

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Nazareth considers banning bamboo

Homeowner tells councilmen tale of invasive plant reeking havoc on her property.

By KEVIN DUFFY
Special to The Morning Call

Nazareth may soon follow the lead of other Lehigh Valley municipalities in banning an invasive plant that can cause major headaches for property owners.

Borough Council will consider an ordinance making it illegal to plant bamboo after a resident went before them to share her story of woe Thursday night.

In May, Diane Paine closed on a twin home on South New Street and, she told council, only afterward was informed by the seller that bamboo was present and encroaching on her property.

Raised in the borough and a retired New Jersey school administrator, Paine lives on South Broad Street and said she bought the home as a residence for her son.

But she told a council workshop session she never would have done so had she known that bamboo had crept from her neighbor's property onto hers, and would eventually threaten her investment.

Paine said the invasive planting has taken off some of the siding of her house and is threatening to undermine the foundation.

Paine showed council pictures she has taken of the massive growth, including piles she said she had cut down.

She said attempts to contact the neighbor have been unsuccessful.

Councilman Charles Donello said he personally visited the property and urged his colleagues to consider passage of an ordinance prohibiting the planting of bamboo.

"It's out of hand and probably something that we should have never had in the town," he said.

They agreed — Mayor John Samus said the spread of the noxious plant could threaten gas and sewer lines — and Chairman Dan Chiavaroli said the matter would be taken up for discussion by the law committee.

"We can look at an ordinance," Councilman Lance Colondo told Paine.

Once enacted, they would join some neighbors in cutting off the spread of the creeping property threat. Bethlehem Township banned the planting of bamboo in 2015, and Forks Township followed suit last year.

Paine is the first resident to go before council with concerns over the invasive plant, Chiavaroli said.

Donello said he spoke to the owner and "got a feeling" that he will try to eradicate the plant.

Kevin Duffy is freelance writer.

Bamboo is taboo in Forks Township

Supervisors to draft ordinance that will classify the woody grass as a 'noxious weed.'

BY DARYL NERL

Special to The Morning Call

To some, bamboo is an ornamental plant of unique beauty with numerous potential applications from nutrition to medicine to building products.

To others, like John Cosgrove of Red Fox Lane in Forks Township, bamboo is a fast-growing invasive menace that has been disrupting his garden and is backbreaking and expensive to eliminate.

On Thursday, Cosgrove asked township supervisors to consider adding bamboo to its list of "noxious weeds," which would require those with bamboo plantings to add physical barriers to prevent them from spreading to neighboring properties.

Supervisors agreed, instructing solicitor Wendy Nicolosi to draft an ordinance that would impose code violations on those who do not take precautions against the plant's spread.

Bethlehem Township took similar measures last summer after a dispute between neighbors.

Forks Township Parks and Recreation Director Rachel Sulzbach told supervisors that bamboo issues have also cropped up in the Collège Estates neighborhood.

Cosgrove brought photographs to show how quickly the bamboo shot up on his side of the fence between his neighbor and him. In a 10-day period, while he was on vacation, the tall woody grasses had grown between 5 and 8 feet, he said.

Ridding your garden of bamboo requires digging beneath the roots, Cosgrove said. After dealing with the problem for years, he hired professional help this summer, which cost \$200 for two men to work for four hours.

When Cosgrove presented his neighbor with the bill, "she went ballistic," he said. "She told me: 'I'm not paying you anything.'"

To prevent spread, the American Bamboo Society recommends erecting barriers of high-density polyethylene to at least 30 inches below the ground and 2 inches above. Poured concrete can also be effective.

In other business, supervisors awarded a contract for \$678,125 to R-III Construction of Creamery Road in Bushkill Township to replace nearly a mile of sewer mains along Richmond Road and Ramblewood Drive to the Frost Hollow pump station.

Daryl Nerl is a freelance writer.

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