

News Journal

Estimated printed pages: 2

September 27, 2005

Section: Local

Page: B1,B2

Newark council offers landlords money to fund security upgrades

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NJ

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A program that would help apartment owners pay for security improvements such as more effective locks and peepholes won approval Monday from Newark City Council.

Council members agreed to allocate \$25,000 in community development money to help rental-apartment owners install the safeguards. Landlords could start applying for the money Dec. 1.

Council also approved an ordinance requiring security features including upgraded locks, sliding glass door bars, peepholes, auto-locking entrance doors and security lighting in all new multi-family dwellings (three or more units).

The program follows the slaying of University of Delaware student Lindsey M. Bonistall in the spring. Police said the sophomore was raped and strangled by an attacker who broke into her off-campus apartment through a locked sliding glass door.

Councilman Kevin Vonck said that he was excited about the program, but that council should consider requiring the safety measures in all existing buildings, not just new ones.

"I don't want to wait until we have another incident before we do something," he said. "We should have it come back to us as a requirement.

We could give the landlords an opportunity to come down and give us feedback. I'm not saying it has to be done overnight."

Newark Planning Director Roy Lopata said he wanted to try out the program first. He said he had mixed expectations of how many apartment owners would request the money.

"We did research and very few cities retrofit," he said. "They [existing buildings] are grandfathered in. This will be first-come, first-serve."

One of the incentives for apartment owners will be getting the Lindsey M. Bonistall Foundation seal of approval, Lopata said.

The slain student's father, Mark Bonistall, has established the foundation to help make college campuses safer nationwide, starting at UD.

Incentives to upgrade

Bonistall wants the foundation and police to assess off-campus housing units every 60 days to make sure they comply with safety standards. Those that do would be included on a list of certified off-campus housing facilities on the university's Web site.

"If this gets off the ground and parents see this, the existing apartments will have a tremendous incentive to comply with this," Lopata said. "We can't continue to do things as we've done in the past."

In other action Monday, City Council said farewell to Newark Police Chief Gerald Conway, who is leaving the city to become a Delaware State Police red-light camera technician. He begins the new position Oct. 10.

Conway, who has been chief since 1999, said it would be a good career change. "I was looking for a little less pressure

and stress," he said.

City Manager Carl Luft is expected to make a decision about Conway's acting or permanent replacement when he returns next week.

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