

Illegal Alien Ban Explored

August 10, 2006

**By: Keith Phucas
Times Herald**

BRIDGEPORT - Borough Council members plan to explore a measure that would ban illegal aliens from working or renting property in Bridgeport.

Councilwoman Juanita Coover raised the issue at Tuesday's regular meeting, and Councilman Pete Kohut and John Pizza favored forming a committee to discuss the controversial issue.

In July, the city of Hazleton, Pa., and New Jersey's Riverside Township passed measures stopping undocumented people from holding jobs or renting property.

The Hazleton ordinance also made English the city's official language.

Pizza said the ban in the New Jersey township hastened the departure of undocumented workers there.

"In Riverside, New Jersey, its illegal population has been cut (significantly)," he said. "Once people knew it was adopted, the exodus started immediately."

On July 13, Hazleton's City Council passed the Illegal Immigration Relief Act that fines landlords \$1,000 for each illegal immigrant tenant renting property and has the power to suspend business licenses of those employing undocumented workers.

Hazleton Mayor Lou Barletta proposed the legislation in an effort to curb violent crime, overcrowded schools, higher hospital costs and the demand for city services.

Riverside Township passed a similar measure July 26 at a township meeting.

Illegal aliens, no matter their country of origin, put a strain on city and municipal services, Kohut said. "They get police protection, they get fire protection," he said.

Bridgeport, which has a modest annual budget, has struggled to equip the borough's fire companies with emergency radios and other equipment this year. Many radios were bought with private donations and grants. At Tuesday's meeting, Police Chief Zenny Martyniuk pressed council for \$11,000 to purchase two mobile data terminals for police vehicles. He described the department's current system as "outdated."

Kohut said it's critical that borough residents be legal "so that people are paying taxes." He anticipates the legislative trend would continue given Congress' inability to pass laws restricting illegal aliens. "The federal government is taking its time," he said. "So we'll do it on the local level."

The borough has received complaints about overcrowded residences and noise, Coover said. Overcrowded living conditions raise safety issues, she said, and the borough is currently reexamining its occupancy codes. "We're looking at all our ordinances," she said.

Keith Phucas can be reached at kphucas@timesherald.com or 610-272-2500, ext. 211.