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Sinkhole rules pushed

Tatamy law would prevent building too near sinkholes.

Wednesday, September 29, 2004

By **ALYSSA YOUNG**
 The Express-Times

TATAMY -- The borough planning commission Tuesday recommended borough council create a law to prevent construction on land plagued by sinkholes.

The borough is following its neighbors' lead. Stockertown adopted a sinkhole ordinance in August, and Upper Nazareth Township implemented identical rules Sept. 15. Their laws match the law Palmer Township supervisors approved in July 2003.

Tatamy is considering the same law, which would require sinkhole evaluations before land development begins in subdivisions with three or more lots.

Developers would submit a "carbonate ordinance assessment report" that describes the conditions of the land, shows where they want to build and explains how they will prepare land where sinkhole features are present.

The rules say buildings and stormwater management basins must be at least 100 feet from the edge of a sinkhole and no closer than 50 feet from faults or closed depressions.

To prevent sinkholes from developing, stormwater runoff could not be directed toward these geological features.

According to the Lehigh Valley Planning Commission, Forks, Lower Mount Bethel, Bethlehem, East Allen and Lower Nazareth townships have similar ordinances.

The LVPC has recommended that the communities in the Nazareth Area Council of Governments adopt a sinkhole law. Tatamy is part of the COG, which is incorporating sinkhole data into a multi-municipal comprehensive plan in the works.

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A sinkhole-prone stretch of the Bushkill Creek runs along Tatamy's eastern border.

In October 2000, the Bushkill Street bridge connecting the borough and Stockertown collapsed into a sinkhole. It is scheduled for reconstruction next summer.

The northbound Route 33 bridge damaged by a sinkhole in January is just northwest of the small borough.

In the aftermath of the Sept. 18 flood, a sinkhole on Tatamy Road in Palmer Township cut off the borough's southern gateway. At the same time, the other roads leading into Tatamy were flooded shut.

Borough council's next meeting is Oct. 4. It must vote to advertise the sinkhole ordinance before it could take effect.

Also Tuesday, planning commission Chairman Anthony Jaskowiec said he expects the advisory board will review sketch plans at next month's meeting for a subdivision with more than 80 homes north of Main Street next to Equipto.

Signature Homes by J.T. Maloney is proposing the development, he said.

Reporter Alyssa Young can be reached at 610-863-3841 or by e-mail at ayoung@express-times.com.

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