



# CITY OF WILLIAMSPORT

## *BUREAU OF POLICE*

### **Connection continued**

The traditional approach of waiting for enough evidence for police to serve a search warrant often comes too late to protect the community from drug activity and its ill effects on our neighborhoods. Most landlords are not skilled in prevention of illegal activity on their rental properties and believe that it is not their job to protect our citizens as it is the job of the police. Many landlords believe that how they operate their business is nobody's business but their own.

Historically most drug activity such as growing, manufacturing, and distributing takes place at rental properties. We must ask ourselves the following questions. Do we have a rental based crime problem? Is our community plagued by drug houses, and other chronic criminal problems that are frequently based in rental properties? Does the number of complaints received from the public regarding illegal drug activity outweigh law enforcements capacity to respond?

The answer to the above questions is yes. Chronic drug activity and its associated illegal activities have reduced many of our neighborhoods into shells of what they once were. This chronic drug activity in rental properties attracts other nuisance behaviors that diminish the entire community's quality of life. These behaviors include, loitering, littering, trespassing, prostitution, drug use, abandoned vehicles, unwanted additional vehicular and foot traffic, graffiti, thefts from vehicles, residential burglaries, weapons violations, and other violent crimes. A quick review of the police blotter in the local newspaper will confirm that these nuisance crimes are a daily occurrence.

Many absentee landlords willfully rent their properties to chronic drug users or others who associate with those who sell drugs which creates an instant drug market at that particular property. Absentee and naïve landlords who do not live in or near their rental properties often don't know who belongs at the property and who doesn't. This can make it extremely difficult on law enforcement. These nuisances become chronic when the dysfunctional behavior of a few and the enabling behavior of many combine with the weaknesses in the communities system for responding therefore compounding the problem. This is just a simple example of how quickly a drug market can open at a rental property if not properly screened.

Many landlords cite fear of the Federal Fair Housing laws that prohibit discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, handicap, national origin, or familial status (presence of children). State and local governments can add others such as marital status, sexual orientation, source of income and others. Nothing in the fair housing laws forbids landlords from setting fair screening guidelines and applying them equally to all applicants. Some landlords use this as an excuse to rent to questionable individuals who are willing to pay cash which can become a source of hidden income for the absentee landlord.

Captain Timothy S. Miller  
Williamsport Bureau of Police

THIS MESSAGE IS APPROVED BY MAYOR GABRIEL CAMPANA