

## Outdoor wood-furnace use still allowed

Law would have limited use in town of Oneonta

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WEST ONEONTA \_ The Oneonta Town Board has shelved legislation that would ban outdoor wood furnaces from the more residential parts of town and limit their use elsewhere.

The box-shaped outdoor furnaces have gained in popularity in recent years due to their efficiency and cost savings, especially in rural areas. The furnaces allow for a single, outdoor unit to heat a home and outbuildings, as well as provide residential hot water. The furnaces can even be used to heat hot tubs and pools.

But they are controversial. "A lot of places have outright banned them," Oneonta Town Supervisor Robert Wood said Monday.

Wood said a wood furnace has, in at least one case in the town, pitted neighbor against neighbor due to the smoke it produces.

"We had a specific complaint," he said.

When town officials looked into it, they found complaints were "not uncommon" in other parts of the state, Wood said.

The legislation, which would ban the furnaces in the more densely populated zoning districts in the town while allowing restricted use in other areas, was pursued out of concern there would be more people wanting to use them in the future as wood heating continues to be an economical option, Wood said.

The proposed restrictions include a requirement that smokestacks be higher than the nearest neighbors' roofs, a 100-foot setback from property lines for furnaces and usage limited to cooler months to avoid smoke wafting into windows.

"They are a big investment," Wood said, as the furnaces can cost between \$8,000 and \$12,000.

The town was expecting to include a "grandfather" clause to allow those who already have the furnaces to keep them, at least for a period of years after the ordinance is adopted.

But after speaking with a dealer of the wood furnaces and taking into account that the heating season has already arrived, the town decided to shelve the legislation until next year.

Wood said he did not know exactly how many outdoor wood furnaces there were in the town, but he said they were very few.

Otsego County Conservation Association Executive Director Erik Miller said OCCA does not have an official policy on outdoor wood furnaces. But he said OCCA does assist municipalities in drafting regulations limiting or banning their use.

"The problem is these are unregulated heavy polluting heat resources," Miller said. "They are probably 100 times worse than your average wood stoves." Newer models address pollution concerns Miller said newer units have better emission controls to address these concerns.

Bob Swantak of Swantak Inc., located 10 miles south of Oneonta on state Route 28, was the dealer who consulted with the town on the outdoor wood furnaces.

"I just want them to be aware of everything that's going on," Swantak said.

Among the newest outdoor furnaces he carries are wood pellet and corn-fired models manufactured by

Central Boiler. He said those are 97 percent efficient and are the cleanestburning models in the country.

"That's right on the edge of technology," Swantak said.

The Environmental Protection Agency has a voluntary program that went into effect in October that designates the cleanest-burning furnaces, such as the model Swantak sells, as "Phase 2 qualified."

Phase 1 qualified furnaces were first designated as such last year under the voluntary program and are 70 percent cleaner than unqualified furnaces. Phase 2 qualified furnaces are 90 percent cleaner than unqualified furnaces.

Wood said the town board decided to take a look at the new technology and revisit the ordinance early next year.

"These units are much cleaner and cause less problems," he said.