



**Lakewood Mayor Raymond G. Coles says more than \$300,000 is budgeted this year for new technology for the township's inspection department.** (FILE PHOTO)

# Upgrades to help housing oversight

Inspection records will be computerized; other changes coming

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**LAKEWOOD** — The township plans to shake up its inspection department this year.

A project to revamp the department includes new computers that will make it easier for employees and the public to look at inspection records.

Digital cameras will record the condition of an apartment before a new tenant moves in, said Mayor Raymond G. Coles and Edward Mack, director of code enforcement and zoning.

Coles said the plan to modernize the department is important as Lakewood grapples with a lack of affordable housing and thousands of illegal housing units, many of which are considered unsafe to live in.

ment will help inspectors settle disagreements between landlords and tenants because information on the apartment's history will be easily accessible at the zoning office, Coles said. The township included \$14,000 toward the \$298,000 in its recently approved municipal budget. Township manager Frank Edwards said the committee is expected to pass a bond ordinance for the balance sometime this summer.

"The problems took years to create," Coles said. "Hopefully, it won't take years to solve them, but they won't be solved overnight. This is a good first step."

The initiative includes:

■ Computerizing housing records.

The current paper filing system is antiquated and makes it cumbersome for employees and the public to review records, Mack said. Right now, housing applications, Board of Adjustment reports and maps litter desks, cabinets and entire rooms at the zoning office. The township will scan in the paper documents so they can easily be viewed on a computer screen at the inspection department's Fourth Street building.

■ Having Mack meet regularly with the township's largest landlords.

Mack said he already has met with several landlords to increase communication. An understanding between landlords and inspectors before property owners apply for certificates of occupancy, or C.O.s, would ease tensions in the process, Mack said.

"The less painful it is to get a C.O.," Mack said, "the more people will get a C.O."

Mack also said he wants to create a master checklist for C.O.s so each rental unit in town is held to the same benchmark for approval. The checklist would take subjectivity out of the inspection process, he said.

"It's been more the opinion of the inspector," Mack said, acknowledging different inspectors will hold landlords to different standards. "We need to be uniform through the town."