

Partnering with pawnbrokers

ELIZABETHTOWN — City officials soon may require pawn shops and pawnbrokers operating within the city to use a trackable electronic records system in an effort to curb theft and recover stolen property.

Council members on Monday approved the first reading of an ordinance amending Chapter 112 of the city's Code of Ordinances. The amendment would require pawn shops and pawnbrokers to join **LeadsOnline**, a database that tracks stolen property and those suspected of the theft.

Elizabethtown Police Department already has established a partnership with **LeadsOnline**. By requiring participation in the database, the proposed ordinance would simplify the department's search for stolen goods, which may pass through a pawnbroker's hands, EPD Spokesman Virgil Willoughby said. The department would have access to the inventory of each store and could match serial numbers with those of stolen items.

Under the ordinance, information is to be updated every 24 hours. The program is not new, Willoughby added. Some pawn shops within the city already have taken the initiative to work alongside police.

Ron Mullinix, an employee at Uncle Dan's Pawn Gun & Archery, said the shop has been using electronic records since around 1999 and is a part of the **LeadsOnline** database. "We've been doing this for years," he said.

Donna Kirchhofer, owner of E-Town Pawn & Gun, said her shop also is on the database. Kirchhofer's store, alongside Uncle Dan's, was one of the first shops to add the database, she said, and she's been using it for at least three years.

"I think it's a great idea," she said.

Kirchhofer said pawn shops often are willing to work with law enforcement agencies in recovering stolen property, though that's not always the image attached to the shops. "Contrary to popular belief, I'd like to think we stave off some crime," Kirchhofer said.

Pawn shops have 30 days upon adoption of the ordinance to join the database, and failure to do so will result in a misdemeanor charge. If convicted of the charge, pawn shop owners could face fines of \$25 per day until the electronic system is established.

But Willoughby said the goal of the ordinance is to establish partnerships, not punish business owners. "We just want to have a good working relationship with everyone in town," he said.