



## THE EXPRESS-TIMES

### Felled trees raise furor

Developer cuts down five maples that officials say were on Forks Township property.

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By **JIMMY P. MILLER**  
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FORKS TWP. | The township is considering taking civil and possibly criminal legal action against developer Gary Strausser after he cut down five trees on township property without permission.

Township Engineer Fred Hay said Strausser cut down eight mature maple trees -- all of them at least 30 inches in diameter, and one of them 53 inches -- along Old River Road just north of Frost Hollow Road.

Three of the trees were on Strausser property, but the other five were in the township's right of way, Hay said. Supervisor C. David Howell called the tree cutting an "atrocious act."

Howell said Strausser removed the trees without permission because they were blocking the view of the Delaware River from the 12th hole of his Riverview Country Club golf course.

"I think it was an act of vandalism caused by Mr. Strausser's greed and selfinterest," Howell said, adding that he used to eat lunch under those trees when he was a child in the 1950s.

Strausser attorney Gary Asteak said the township required Strausser to remove the trees as part of the golf course's road improvement plan that supervisors approved in 2000. He acknowledged that Strausser cut down five trees that were on township property, but argued the township planned to eventually deed the right of way containing the trees over to Strausser anyway.

"Maybe you didn't look at these plans carefully enough," Asteak said. "The plans are detailed and complicated, so maybe you overlooked it."

Hay disputed that. He said two or three of the trees would have to come down eventually, but not the five that were not on Strausser's property.

"We had meetings on this project for months, and we never approved the removal of these trees," Hay said. "I'm looking at this plan, part of which I wrote myself. I don't see anything on this plan saying the trees were to be removed."

Township Solicitor Steven Goudsouzian said Strausser clearly violated both the conditions that supervisors imposed on the golf course's development and township ordinances governing development and tree removal in general.

Planning Commission Chairman Erik Chuss called the cutting "criminal mischief or vandalism."

"It's as if a teenager went into a township park and cut a bunch of trees down," he said.

Zoning Officer Tim Weiss said Strausser tried to remove the trees several years ago, but was ordered to stop. "We told him that under no circumstances was he to cut down those trees," Weiss said.

Several residents came to Thursday's supervisor's meeting to show their anger over the tree cutting. Emily Heitzman, whose property abuts the golf course, said Strausser began cutting the trees Aug. 9 and was finished by the next day. She said a Strausser workman told her he was from the township, and that the township ordered that the trees be removed.

"We fought for these trees years ago, and they belong to the township," she said.

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