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## **Forks supervisors approve zoning to cluster homes**

### **New rules call for 3-acre lots in farmland district, or 1-acre lots with open space.**

By Joe Nixon  
Of The Morning Call

Forks Township supervisors have approved an updated zoning ordinance that promotes clustering of single-family homes, including in the farmland preservation district, an area in the township's northeast that is coming under development pressure.

The approval came Thursday amid a difference in philosophy on the farmland district between the township and the Lehigh Valley Planning Commission, which reviewed the new zoning law. Supervisors voted 4-1 to approve the new zoning measure, with Chairman John Ackerman dissenting.

The new zoning does not change existing zoning districts or boundaries.

The updated land use regulations require a 3-acre minimum lot size for conventional single-family home development in the farmland district, but allow for 1-acre lots if 50 percent of a development is preserved as open space. The Planning Commission said it believed development of 3-acre lots in the farmland district will "constitute sprawl" and suggested clustering be mandatory. The commission review is advisory and not binding on the township.

In a draft response to the commission, the township said it decided to use incentives to preserve agricultural land and was not recommending central water and sewer be extended into the farmland district. The township said the upgraded 3-acre lot size was meant to encourage developers to use the clustering option.

"We hope that developers do not choose the 3-acre option, but feel a need legally to provide a non-cluster option," the draft response states.

The previous township ordinance required a 2-acre minimum lot size when clustering was not used. Plans for a large housing development in the farmland district, with homes on 2-acre lots, were submitted late last year under the old ordinance. King's Farm, a joint venture between Nic Zawarski & Son and Signature Homes, calls for 182 homes on 436 acres.

Ackerman said he agreed with 99 percent of the new ordinance, but said he felt that going to a 3-acre minimum in the farmland district would make land less attractive for development and perhaps less valuable. He called the increase in minimum lot size a "waste of land."

"Most people don't want 3 acres," Ackerman said after the meeting. "Some people don't want 2 acres. They don't want to spend all weekend mowing grass."

Supervisor David Hoff said he wasn't sure the new ordinance would achieve the desired residential clustering, but added, "I'm hoping this is a step in the right direction."

Ordinance amendments could be in the offing. Supervisor C. David Howell said he was concerned about buffer zones for bars and restaurants.

The zoning changes were studied for more than a year with the help of Urban Research and Development Corp. of Bethlehem.

Officials said a prime aim was to bring zoning district standards in line with the purposes of the districts. For example, new housing is no longer permitted in the town center zoning district, an area in southern Forks along Sullivan Trail that is earmarked for business.

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