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## Forks told zoning battle could be long fight

**Solicitor informs supervisors that challenge could take five years in courts.**

By Joe Nixon Of The Morning Call

A recent challenge of Forks Township's zoning ordinance, in particular the farmland protection district, could potentially be a 5-year legal battle if the issue goes to state appeals courts, according to township solicitor Karl Kline.

Kline briefed township supervisors on the zoning challenge in executive session after the supervisors' regular meeting Thursday, but there was no comment from board members during the meeting. Supervisors Chairman David Hoff and Supervisor Bonnie Nicholas were absent Thursday.

"I think, quite frankly, it's an effort to force the township to make a zoning change in that area," Kline told supervisors after explaining the basic charges in the challenge during the public meeting.

Bucks-Lehigh Land Company LLC, a partnership between Nic Zawarski and Sons of Bethlehem and Doylestown-based Signature Homes and Bethlehem attorney Dennis Benner, last week filed a challenge to the zoning ordinance, disputing the 3-acre minimum lot size in the farmland district and alleging the township doesn't provide a fair share of land for mobile homes and multi-family housing. Single-family homes are allowed on 1-acre lots in the farmland district if half the tract is preserved as open space. Multi-family housing is not allowed in the farmland area.

Zawarski and Signature were unsuccessful last summer in their bid to get a zoning overlay to allow 800 housing units on about 400 acres in the farmland district. They submitted plans late last year for 185 single-family homes on about 500 acres, a plan that complied with the 2-acre minimum lot size in place at the time. While that plan is still valid, sketch plans filed with the zoning challenge show a potential for more than 3,000 condominiums, mobile homes and townhouses on about 545 acres.

James Wideman, a township planning commission member who lives near the disputed area, expressed his "extreme dissatisfaction" with the zoning challenge and urged supervisors not to be "terrorized" by the zoning challenge. He said the demands on township infrastructure from the proposed apartments, townhomes and mobile homes are "so astronomical it is beyond my belief."

No other residents spoke on the zoning issue Thursday. The challenge will be heard by the township Zoning Hearing Board, most likely sometime in August.

In other business Thursday, supervisors met with the township Recreation Board in a workshop before Thursday's regular supervisors meeting, resolving to establish more frequent communication. The township expects to survey residents this summer about their parks and recreation needs, and the area will be an important part of the update of the township's comprehensive plan.

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