



## THE EXPRESS-TIMES

### Traffic should jam homes proposal

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Forks township zoning debate

The developers of the proposed Kings Mill residential community in Forks Township no doubt would love to have a pop-up spam blocker to help with their case before the township zoning board. Every time the lawyer representing the developer, KMRD LP, insists that a technical change in zoning is the only issue that should be on the screen

BAM!

Up comes the number 18,000.

Actually, there are other relevant numbers in this debate -- the 1,952 apartments, 731 mobile homes and 359 town houses that KMRD wants to build on 550 acres in a farmland-preservation district. The developer and the zoning board are locked into a lengthy series of hearings as KMRD tries to show that Forks has been negligent in allowing high-density housing.

This is a ritual many townships know too well. The zoning hearings in Forks may go on for another year, and if the board rejects the Kings Mill plan, it most likely will end up in court. Last month the supervisors rejected the developer's offer to negotiate a lesser number of homes on the protected farmland.

Earlier this week, the two sides went back to the zoning board for more testimony, when

BAM!

That in-your-face number again.

18,000.

By now people who live and drive in Forks Township and its neighboring communities know the number. It's an estimate by traffic experts on the additional daily vehicle trips that will demand space and time on township roads if Kings Mill is built as planned.

If this development were being plopped down near a nexus of interstates, there'd be little reason to fear 18,000 more internal combustion engines in the mix. Forks Township, however, is served by two-lane roads to get to anywhere. Most of them, notably Sullivan Trail, Route 611 and Bushkill Drive, have become twice-a-day commuter logjams.

At Monday's hearing, traffic engineer John Wichner tried to put 18,000 trips into perspective. The additional load would be the equivalent, he said, to the daily volume on Union Boulevard in Bethlehem, and close to the bumper-to-bumperage that clogs Route 412 between Bethlehem and Hellertown each weekday. (The difference, however, is that both those roads are fairly close to major highways.)

No matter how often KMRD's lawyer protests that "18,000" is irrelevant and that a developer shouldn't be held accountable for this impact, township officials are correct to allow testimony arguing that 1) at some point all systems break down with too much use, and 2) preserving farmland in an increasingly crowded township is a way to offset that breakdown -- particularly when Forks has no way to convert its narrow dial-up roads into the equivalent of high-speed Internet connections.

There's no guarantee the courts will see it the same way, but the zoners and supervisors should stick to their plan. At some point, sanity has to re-enter the debate.