



## THE EXPRESS-TIMES

### Time to enforce zoning ordinance

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Forks Township land development

Another 3,000 blips showed up on Forks Township's planning-zoning radar screen last week, as township officials began preparing for a long-haul battle with a group of home builders who propose to carve up another 545 acres of land, most of it in the township's farmland preservation district.

Just when is enough enough?

And when does the township get serious about enforcing its existing zoning, which is designed to retain at least part of the township's once-rural character and prevent Sullivan Trail and other two-lane township arteries from decomposing further into crawling auto trains twice a day?

Clearly, the answer is: Now. Today. Before it's five years from now and residents are wondering why township officials didn't exert a little more control and foresight back in 2006.

Preliminary plans filed last week call for the construction of 1,952 apartments, 731 mobile homes and 359 townhomes on several tracts. That's 3,042 new homes, each coming with a predictable addition of vehicles and classroom demand on the taxpayers of the Easton Area School District.

The developers of record are Nic Zawarski and Sons Developers Inc., Nic Zawarski and Sons Development Corp., Bucks-Lehigh Land Co. LLC and KMRD L.P., who are seeking a zoning hearing to change the farmland preservation designation from one home per 3 acres to well, do the math -- 3,042 homes, 545 acres.

So far township officials are saying all the right things, promising a fair hearing without prejudging. But the numbers alone are enough to prompt many officials and residents to begin hunkering down for a no-nonsense enforcement of the existing zoning.

That's how it should be. The developers will seek to show how Forks Township's zoning is out of kilter and should be squeezed to permit more apartments, town houses and manufactured homes. Township officials need to stick to their master plan and say: "We've done enough. The open land stays open."

It seems simple enough, but this battle could end up in litigation for years, which taxpayers will have to pay to defend. The first leg is the township defending its up-to-date zoning map, which can be augmented by backup from the Lehigh Valley Planning Commission and local public support.

Last year the township planning commission rejected an 800-home proposal by a partnership of Nic Zawarski and Sons and Signature Homes for a farmland preservation district. That was a good precedent, but it looks like it merely energized an effort to quadruple the swallowing of farmland.

To preserve its quality of life, Forks must stand firm and enforce its zoning law.

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