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District has big concerns about major development

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By **COLIN MCEVOY**
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FORKS TWP. | As the township and the King's Mill developer start looking toward a possible compromise, Easton Area School District officials are concerned about the effect the proposed development could have on their schools.

Under the plan, the 3,000-home development would result in about 4,800 new students – or roughly half of the current student body – in a district already pressed for space, school officials said.

That would cost the district about \$45 million in staff, administrative and transportation costs, Business Manager Jeff Bader said.

That does not include any building expansions, which would likely be another \$10 million to \$40 million, he said.

"When they were talking about 3,000 homes, I almost had a heart attack," board member Alfred Capecci said. "We're talking millions and millions and millions of dollars. We're talking big time."

The 545-acre development is frozen in litigation with developer KMRD LP challenging the township zoning ordinances.

Calls seeking comment from several KMRD officials went unreturned.

Township and developer officials have been in "informal discussions," examining possible alternatives to long and expensive litigation, but neither party has made any proposal so far and both can restart litigation if an agreement is not reached, township Solicitor Karl Kline said.

But even a compromise could be bad news for the school district.

At the state planning average of 1.6 students per home, Bader said cutting the development in half would still result in 2,400 new students, which is roughly 25 percent of the current student population of about 9,000.

"That's still a significant number and a significant impact," Bader said.

The school district has made a number of expansions in recent years, including an \$80 million addition at Shawnee Middle School in Forks Township.

Bader said the King's Mill development would require further school expansions and possibly an entirely new school building. Space for a new building is also an issue.

Board member Randolph Mahl said because school districts, unlike townships, have no authority to seek fees from developments to help offset capital costs, the burden would be left on the school and taxpayers.

"It would be a major impact on the school," Mahl said. "And with the way state law is written, the school would be left to deal with it."

The Forks Township Zoning Hearing Board is scheduled to meet Monday for the 15th hearing on the zoning challenge.

Kline said the board will consider a continuance or postponement on the proceedings at that meeting, which

would give time for the township and developer to further discuss a possible middle ground.

"We're looking at somewhere between zero and 3,000" homes, Kline said of the compromise the township was seeking. "The township would never agree to anything near that magnitude of houses."

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