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### Battle with businessman could cost \$70,000

#### Clash: Man blocks Forks' plans for traffic light; without his OK, project is dead.

By Christopher Baxter

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A dispute between Forks Township officials and a local business owner over a proposed traffic light at Sullivan Trail and Meco Road may cost taxpayers more than \$70,000.

The Pennsylvania Department of Transportation -- responsible for issuing permits for traffic signals -- will not green-light the project unless Rob Leiser, owner of Leiser's Rental Barn, agrees to either waive his right to sue the agency or move his driveway away from the intersection, said PennDOT spokesman Ronald Young.

But Leiser said the township proceeded with more than \$70,000 in design and engineering work without involving him in the discussions, and he refuses to sign off on the plan.

"Until they come to me with a proposal that I will accept, as far as I'm concerned, it's not going to happen," said Leiser, of Plainfield Township, who opened the store in 1985.

Annoyed local officials spoke out at a recent supervisors meeting, saying that Leiser was "holding the project hostage" and was "putting his individual interests above the safety of the community."

"The township was willing to spend the money to design the improvements, to pay all costs of the improvements, and PennDOT is saying that unless this one individual cooperates, it's dead," said solicitor Karl Kline.

Friction between Leiser and the township dates to 2002, when Leiser was denied a building permit to expand his business. But the argument has literally spilled into the streets, costing taxpayer money and preventing safety improvements at one of the township's most congested intersections.

The original proposal allowed Leiser to keep his current driveway as long as he agreed not to hold PennDOT liable for any problems, said township engineer Fred Hay. But Leiser declined to sign that pact this past spring.

"They sent me this blank release form," Leiser said. "Nobody's that stupid."

Township officials then drafted a second plan, Hay said, which included moving Leiser's driveway roughly 40 feet from the intersection and constructing an additional entrance on Meco Road.

The township agreed to pay for the entire project, but still Leiser will not approve the proposal. And without his blessing, the pricey design will go to waste, officials said.

"And there's absolutely nothing we can do about it," said Chairman Supervisor C. David Howell.

Officials made the traffic light a top priority after a 2004 study identified the intersection as one of the worst in the township. The examination, conducted by Traffic Planning and Design Inc. of Center Valley, focused on 42 intersections and considered development in Forks and adjacent communities through 2012. But few of the study's suggestions have been accomplished, Hay said, partly because the traffic light was given priority.

"The light was an attainable goal and it was a good expenditure of money," Hay said. "We thought it was reasonable until

we ran into this mess."

The township raised \$2 million from a 2003 bond issue to pay for improvements stemming from the study, but \$1.5 million was used to pay for the new municipal building, said Jim Farley, finance manager. About \$400,000 remains in the account for road upgrades, Farley said. The final cost of the traffic light, if installed, remains unknown, Hay said.

Township officials cannot force Leiser to agree to the plan, Kline said. And PennDOT will not consider giving approval without Leiser's cooperation, Young said.

The project could move forward if Leiser changes his mind or sells his property, Hay said. But unless that happens, the taxpayers' money is lost, he said.

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