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## Weis Markets makes Forks pitch

**What grocery will occupy industrial site still undecided.**

By Joe Nixon Of The Morning Call

Weis Markets officials pitched a grocery store plan to the Forks Planning Commission on Thursday, but the project developer said after the meeting that the chain was not a "committed tenant."

Rose Randazzo-Pizzuto, a partner in Pittston-based SamCar Ltd., said there was no signed deal with Weis Markets and added other potential tenants remain. Jack O'Hara, real estate manager for Weis, said the chain was serious about the site — a 9-acre parcel in a business park at the southeast corner of Sullivan Trail and Uhler Road — but could not comment on ongoing negotiations.

Likewise, O'Hara said he could not comment on whether the proposed 62,000-square-foot Forks location, with separate gasoline pumps, would affect the other Weis store in the Easton area, on S. 25th Street in Wilson.

The township earlier this year amended its zoning to allow a large grocery store as a conditional use in the employment center zoning district, adding to a list of permitted uses that includes warehouses, motels and day care centers. SamCar originally proposed building a CVS drugstore on 3 of the 9 acres, but asked the township to consider the grocery use after receiving inquiries from several grocers. The developers said earlier this year they would revert to the pharmacy plan if the township didn't want to consider the grocery change.

A township group, Residents Who Care, has challenged the zoning change, alleging the township engaged in spot zoning when it allowed the grocery use. Assistant township solicitor Steven Goudsouzian told the planners they had to view the grocery plan under the current zoning, which allows the use.

The only other grocery store in Forks is a Giant supermarket in the township's southern end.

David Gill, director of architecture for Weis, said the Forks location would be based on a new prototype Weis store and similar to a remodeled store on Cedar Crest Boulevard in South Whitehall.

Thursday was the first time a grocery tenant had come before the planners, but traffic concerns about the Sullivan Trail-Uhler Road intersection remained. Engineer Jeffrey Ott, of Ott Consulting Inc. of Center Valley, said traffic improvements were planned for the intersection. But he and traffic engineer Rob Hoffman said the state Department of Transportation hasn't indicated a current need for a traffic light at Braden Boulevard and Sullivan Trail. A traffic light was noted in an earlier grocery store sketch plan.

Township engineer Fred Hay said the township was looking to coordinate road improvements with all property owners at the intersection.

Planner James Wideman said because of its location and exposure to major roads, the store design would be under tough scrutiny. Updated plans for the grocery project have not officially come before the planners.

Gill said a Forks Weis store would have upgraded amenities, including higher-end service for meats and prepared take-home meals. "I think it's going to be a very, very nice store, a Class A stellar store," Gill said.

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