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Expert: Forks supermarket would draw heavy traffic

Final arguments in Weis 'spot zoning' case will be heard April 16.

By Madeleine Mathias Of The Morning Call

No commercial use of the tract at Uhler Road and Sullivan Trail in Forks Township would increase traffic as much as a proposed supermarket, a traffic specialist testified at a Monday night hearing on a challenge to last year's zoning change on that land.

Frank Tavani, the specialist from Chester County, said a supermarket of 77,600 square feet would generate 7,937 trips on a weekday, 13,778 on a Saturday and 12,912 on a Sunday, in contrast to an athletic facility, which would have 3,337 on a weekday, 2,984 on a Saturday and 2,853 on a Sunday.

Before the township Zoning Hearing Board, Tavani was testifying for Residents Who Care, a local civic group that filed the challenge to the township's July 2006 rezoning of the tract, in the township's north end.

The group's suit charges the township supervisors improperly used "spot zoning" to allow a Weis Market on the site. The spot zoning did not make for good planning, ignored better alternatives for the land, but was enacted only for Weis' benefit, the group says.

After the testimony, zoning board member Louis Moyer said, rather than hearing closing arguments on Monday, a final meeting will be held on April 16 to give the attorneys representing the township and Residents Who Care time to review the transcripts.

On Feb. 15, Forks supervisors gave conditional-use and preliminary plan approval to a proposed 69,000-square-foot Weis Market on the tract.

Tavani listed several other uses, such as a day-care center, place of worship, recreational facility and a medical clinic, none of which would generate traffic as heavy as a supermarket's.

Tavani said the township has to consider the congestion that can result from the increased traffic, and from the highway reconfigurations that will be made to accommodate the traffic.

The township attorney, Steven Goudsouzian, said the conditional-use permit for the grocery store will require a traffic report be sent to the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation, which owns the two roads at the intersection, and which would assure traffic safety.

Gary Asteak, representing Residents Who Care, said the township can require more road improvements. The township supervisors have the power to limit the uses at the intersection and reduce the level of traffic, Asteak said.

"This was not thought through," Asteak said. "This was done merely to accommodate the developer."

Asteak also charged the township knew a "big box" grocery store was proposed.

Before the zoning change, a large grocery store would have been allowed only in the Town Center district in the southern part of the township.

The only grocery store in the Forks Township is a Giant Store, opened in 2002.

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