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Forks extends hearing on zoning change for market

Residents' group to present testimony against measure.

By Madeleine Mathias Of The Morning Call

After more than 21/2 hours of testimony, the Forks Township Zoning Hearing Board agreed Monday night to hold another hearing on the challenge by a residents' group of a zoning change made by the supervisors last summer.

The zoners set March 26 for the hearing at which time attorney Gary Asteak, representing Residents Who Care, will present a witness to testify on the issue that a grocery store would be allowed in the Employment Center Zoning District.

Steve Goudsouzian, township assistant solicitor, had two witnesses, one of whom testified on traffic impact studies concerning the intersection of Uhler Road and Sullivan Trail, while another outlined the benefits of having one major store on the tract abutting the two roads rather than three different businesses.

The hearing revolved around what has become a controversial decision by the township to change zoning to allow for a large grocery store at the Uhler Road and Sullivan Trail intersection. Before that change, such a store would be allowed only in the Town Center District, considered to be in the southern part of the township. The only grocery in the township is the Giant Store, which opened in 2002.

Residents Who Care believe the zoning change amounts to illegal spot zoning.

In addition to the zoning change, the supervisors on Feb. 15 approved a 65,000-square-foot Weis Market with a gas station as a conditional use on 9 acres in the Employment Center district in the northern part of the township.

Robert Hoffman, a project manager for Traffic Planning and Design Inc. of Center Valley, outlined the work he had done in a traffic study for the township in 2003. He said the land development processes were followed, noting the township could end up with multiple uses on those three lots, creating different kinds of traffic levels.

Questioned by Asteak, Hoffman said recommendations were made to the township at that time about the intersection. He noted that the intersection is problematic, but changes could improve the traffic into and out of the proposed development.

The developers plan a left-turn lane for both northbound and southbound traffic on Sullivan Trail. A new road, Braden Boulevard, would be built from Sullivan Trail to Kesslerville Road, another way to relieve traffic in the area.

Charlie Schmehl, vice president of Urban Research & Development Corp., said what has been planned is in line with good urban planning.

He said the township's goal was to not create any nuisance or hazard within the site. He compared the size of the proposed grocery market to those of the big box stores, most over 100,000 square feet.

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