

Organizations endorse Amity Township's AWIP

By Denise Larive, News Writer

Amity Township officials were advised on March 3 to get to work on rezoning at least 400 acres of land to develop the Amity Township Western Industrial Park.

They were told to also consider acquiring additional contiguous acreage to better attract businesses by offering larger setbacks and lower infrastructure (utility and road improvements) costs.

Edward Swoyer, president of the Greater Berks Development Fund, Reading, and Pamela Shupp, vice president of the Berks Economic Partnership, Reading, said Berks County supports the township's efforts to establish AWIP on north Limekiln Road, Douglassville.

Owners of two large AWIP land tracts proposed the rezoning and industrial park idea to Amity Township officials to prevent their farmland from one day being sold to developers who would build houses.

More houses would result in more children attending the Daniel Boone Area School District and increased taxes to build more schools.

Township officials anticipate that AWIP would offset the school district's millage rate (currently 27.65 mills) by bringing more business into the township and generating local jobs.

Swoyer and Shupp said Amity officials should rezone the site now from rural conservation to light industrial in preparation for an improved economy.

"Our perspective is that it should be considered and as soon as possible," said Swoyer. "Our sense is it could be a good location for a number of reasons — sewer, tie-in for water, potential to tie into the city system if necessary for that volume of utility, and power line potential."

"Sooner or later the country will come out of this tough recession and this area is identified for development," said Swoyer. "The highway (Route 422) is key to economic development. The county has very few shovel-ready industrial sites and this area seems to be in the right location, has good topography and the potential for infrastructure. Limekiln Road is a fairly good road and isn't as difficult as other locations."

The Greater Berks Development Fund provides business support through site selection, relocation, financing, and business growth in

Berks County.

“We’re very supportive of this and will definitely market to businesses that want to come in to Berks but also market to the businesses we want to keep,” said Shupp of the Berks Economic Partnership, adding that the BEP wants to partner and work with the township to market AWIP.

“No one can do anything until you rezone it,” said Shupp. “No one will invest on the possibility that it will be rezoned. You need to take away the unknowns. Look at model ordinances from municipalities that are doing this and design an ordinance like that.”

The Berks Economic Partnership Web site describes BEP as a marketing agency (funded by the county and businesses) and a primary point of contact for all economic development inquiries related to the Greater Reading and Berks County area.

Amity Township Manager Charles E. Lyon said their opinions confirm that of the township’s land planning consultant for AWIP, Raymond Ott, of Ray Ott & Associates, West Chester.

Ott has presented several business development scenarios to township officials, including a mixed use of business and residential.

Swoyer said including residential could deter business development.

“Businesses don’t want to hear that they are aggravating the residential,” said Swoyer. “Warehousing wouldn’t be right for the site, but possibly some flex industrial uses with offices in the front. Amity might be able to get the best of both worlds.”

He said the Greater Berks Development Fund would be interested in helping with the AWIP project.

Swoyer said the organization would consider becoming involved in the development and help with marrying up the necessary resources.

Board Chairman Robert R. Yanos said he is disappointed that a majority of the Exeter Township Board of Supervisors is opposed to the AWIP proposal.

“We do want to work with Exeter,” said Yanos. “I’m disappointed with the position they’ve taken. They were informed one year ago about AWIP and they never met with us. Exeter has made several changes and we didn’t care.”

He said Amity, Exeter and the Borough of St. Lawrence didn’t adopt joint zoning and Exeter officials don’t have a say in how Amity develops its

land, even though AWIP would be located one mile from the Exeter Township line. Development of AWIP would include amending the Joint Comprehensive Plan and rezoning the land.

Board members said they don't know where Exeter Supervisor Michelle Kircher's estimate of 8,000 round trips daily to AWIP (not including trucks) originated from since Amity doesn't even know yet what land uses would be in AWIP.

On Feb. 24, Kircher said Exeter Township officials are pleased that the industrial park would create jobs but they are concerned with workers using substandard roads to get there.

"I don't care what Exeter thinks about our plan at all," said Amity Supervisor Terry L. Jones. "I think their letter is totally out of line. We have an opportunity to help our residents with our tax problem by generating income from new businesses."

Supervisor Paul R. Weller said he finds it interesting that someone from Exeter Township took the time to measure Amity's bridges in the AWIP area.

Board members said the road infrastructure would be improved as AWIP is developed by businesses and through the payment of Traffic Impact Fee money to the township.

"Massive amounts of traffic will go out to Route 422 or out to Route 562," said Yanos. "All the insufficient bridges are in Amity Township. I don't know that this affects Exeter."

"It only makes sense to me to partner with Union Township and the Borough of Birdsboro (on a joint comprehensive plan) that are in our taxing district," said Lyon.

The municipalities' Joint Comprehensive Plan was adopted in October 2005.