

Amity considers overlay zoning district

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By Denise Larive
News Writer

The Amity Township Board of Supervisors will announce June 1 whether they will continue to draft a new overlay zoning district ordinance for 50 acre parcels along Route 422 that are in the shopping center and highway commercial zones.

Board Chairman Robert R. Yanos said the intent is to consolidate the many fragmented parcels along Route 422 by allowing for 40 percent residential and 60 percent commercial development of parcels that have a minimum 50 gross acres, 300 feet of frontage, and which are under single ownership.

Joseph F. Tornetta, vice president and development director for the Tornetta Realty Corp., in Plymouth Meeting, first proposed the overlay ordinance to the board in 2008 as a means to develop his 100 acres on Township Line Road.

"We need a determination by the board if this is an acceptable standard or not," said Tornetta on May 18, adding, "We think we have an acceptable plan for Amity and we need to move on it if it isn't acceptable."

"We submitted a full economic analysis (in May 2010) and conservatively determined by the ordinance that at the end of a full year of development that it would yield \$2.5 million to the Daniel Boone School District and \$673,860 to the township," said Tornetta.

He said 100 acres of commercial development isn't practical and that Tornetta Realty Corp. has successfully used a similar overlay zoning ordinance concept of residential and commercial in five to six other municipalities.

"Our ultimate fear is the housing component would get built and the commercial would not and how do we address that to not haunt us in dollars and cents later in our lives?" asked Yanos.

He said the township is boxed in by the confines of the river, the railroad track, Route 422, and that the township wants to get top dollar for the commercial space it has through the best commercial development.

Tornetta said the ordinance would permit residential units for age qualified, assisted living, and skilled nursing, and would prohibit single family detached dwellings because of the children that would result.

"If I built 200 homes on 100 acres I would absolutely lose my shirt," said Tornetta. "There are some safeguards because when we move forward to do a land development plan there will be expectations to do infrastructure by the first phase. Residential excludes single family detached and that is a pretty good safeguard. I did an economic analysis for \$10,000 a year ago and I think we've shown pretty

good faith up to this point.”

Tornetta said his company is ready to improve the site’s access and draw up master plans to attract national tenants that can “weather a bad economic storm.”

“The last thing we want is empty commercial buildings,” said Tornetta.

“We want to bring tax relief but there is an element of risk to all of this and it will come down to a judgment call,” said Yanos. “I am torn on this issue and I know there is a risk.”