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By Denise Larive, News Writer

Emotions are high about Amity industrial park

Everyone in Amity Township wants the proposed Amity Township's Western Industrial Park to benefit the township, but residents and township officials have different views on how to "build it" so developers will come to AWIP.

The zoning ordinance draft for AWIP includes a variety of uses permitted by-right that local residents fear are too broad and which will eventually compromise their rural way of life on north Limekiln Road.

AWIP is proposed for a one-mile section on north Limekiln Road that begins one mile off of Route 422.

Peter Gaskins and Thomas and Andrea Kerr, Limekiln Road, live across the street from the proposed site. They said their oppositions are no longer being heard by the AWIP Committee as they were a year-and-a-half ago during the planning meetings.

They were three of about 10 residents who attended the July 28 AWIP meeting and reviewed the draft ordinance prepared by Spotts, Stevens & McCoy, Reading.

Supervisor Terry L. Jones said he thinks the AWIP Committee is being very sensitive to the residents' needs and concerns.

"We tried to incorporate them (their properties into AWIP) and they didn't want it," said Jones. "We're trying to help the community. It sounds a little harsh but sometimes you have to look at the big picture. Unfortunately some people over there aren't going to be happy with the situation when it's finished, but I'd rather have 10 people upset with me than 11,000."

SS&M drafted that the Planned Commercial/Industrial District purpose would be to "provide for business, office and non-nuisance industrial development in a unified, attractive, campus-like environment." Multiple uses on a single tract would be permitted and encouraged.

The township's goal for the 400+ acres of AWIP with the PCI zoning is to provide jobs and tax rateables that would offset the Daniel Boone School District's millage rate of 28.42.

The Berks County Commissioners said at their May 27 meeting that the municipal and school district fiscal needs are out of balance with the tax revenue.

They said the AWIP project "sets the right direction for economic development" in the township which has experienced one of the highest

development in the township which has experienced one of the highest rates of population growth in the county; there has been a 51 percent population increase between 1980 and 2000 and another 25 percent increase by 2005.

The commissioners said Amity's 2005 Joint Comprehensive Plan with the neighboring municipalities of Exeter and St. Lawrence complies with the primary goal "to slow the residential growth and encourage light industrial, office and commercial development to provide a balanced tax base."

AWIP land parcels are currently zoned low density residential, which would permit the construction of single family detached homes when the land is sold.

"They're leaving it [the PCI zoning] open to too many different companies," said Tom Kerr. "AWIP will be a mile off of Route 422. Who is going to come in there? Will the big companies pay to fix (expand and improve) the roads?"

"We understand the industrial use but are concerned about the heliport use and warehouse storage," said Kerr and Gaskins. "There are big issues [proposed] there that not a lot of people know about."

Gaskins and the Kerrs said they don't want to see manufacturing factories, warehousing, and buildings with heliports located across the street from them and are concerned the new zoning will lower their property values.

"We're not objecting to everything, but we are concerned about the buffers and smart planning," said Tom and Pete, adding that the township should authorize SS&M to do a market analysis of the AWIP area.

Kerr said he has lived in the area all of his adult life, his family is highly invested in the community, and they don't want to be pushed out by something across the street.

"I don't want to move because of this and we don't want to fight the township," he said. "We want the land development process to go forward as it should and we know the township is trying to fix it -- the residential."

"We want to look ahead to the goal of the community and want the tax lowered as much as the next person," said Andrea Kerr, adding that the AWIP Committee moved quickly through the draft zoning ordinance on July 28 and seemed anxious to get it completed.

Gaskins and the Kerrs said they felt satisfied that the township would

include buffering of the AWIP perimeter but said they still have a lot of unanswered questions and concerns.

They questioned why supervisors Kimberly J. McGrath and Scott Stepp aren't attending the meetings.

"They were elected to represent the township and we want to know their opinions and if they have any ideas," said Tom. "All the supervisors should come to the meetings."

Jones said there should be a buffer all along Limekiln Road, even a double row of pine trees, so that their "rural way of life isn't disrupted too much."

The AWIP Committee, comprised of members of the township's Board of Supervisors, Planning Commission, and Economic Development Advisory Committee, will meet this Wednesday at 7 p.m. in the Amity Township building, Weavertown and Old Airport roads.

Board of Supervisors Chairman Robert R. Yanos said he hopes the final zoning draft can be approved Aug. 25 so the township can proceed with changing the zoning.

The uses permitted by-right would include business, professional, or governmental offices, the manufacturing, assembly and/or servicing of electronic equipment, light manufacturing and processing of products, printing and publishing facilities, laboratories, hotel and/or conference centers, health clubs, and adult and child daycares.

Also included by-right would be fire and emergency medical services, public/municipal uses, restaurants, personal and household services, office equipment sales/service and copying services, heliports, as well as warehousing any of the above products that are manufactured at the same site.

The draft includes some uses permitted by conditional use that would be approved by the board of supervisors.

"We had to finally narrow it down," said Supervisor Paul R. Weller of the board's work on the zoning draft at the July 28 meeting. "I think we listened to all of the residents concerns, but the board can't keep dragging its feet or we wouldn't accomplish anything."

"The vote was unanimous (3-0 by Yanos, Jones and Weller) in favor of the draft ordinance on July 28 and to proceed with a revised ordinance," said Yanos. "It is a real balancing thing between what we want for the community and what businesses want and what we want to be — what we need to be."

“There were some issues they didn’t like, like the heliports,” said Jones, “but if a company is going to build a \$5 million facility and a heliport for the president that flies in once a week, guess what, I’m voting for the heliport.”