

Most members of Amity economic advisory board quit

Supervisors' decision to include homes in parcel along Route 422 cited as reason

By Kevin Duffy
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Frustration with Amity Township's decision regarding a commercial property off Route 422 has prompted most members of a volunteer advisory board to quit, two former members said.

The township was informed in a July 11 letter that four of the six members of Amity's Economic Development Advisory Council resigned. They were Chairman Majid Alsayegh, Vice Chairman Oddvar Norheim, Secretary Matt Ferdock and member Blair A. Gilbert. Members Robert L. Elsas and Joe Peterson remain.

Ferdock said the Amity supervisors' decision in June to include a substantial residential component within a 100-acre parcel along Route 422 directly led to the resignations.

That action was counter to the advisory board's recommendations, he said.

The parcel, owned by developer Joseph F. Tornetta of the Tornetta Realty Group, Plymouth Meeting, Montgomery County, is zoned for light-industrial uses.

But the township drafted an overlay zoning ordinance proposed by Tornetta to allow for 40 percent residential use.

The site off Route 422 in the eastern end of Amity Township is between Route 662 and the Douglass Township line.

Ferdock said the advisory council's feedback on the overlay was turned aside.

"They ended up ignoring us and going in a completely different direction," he said of the supervisors.

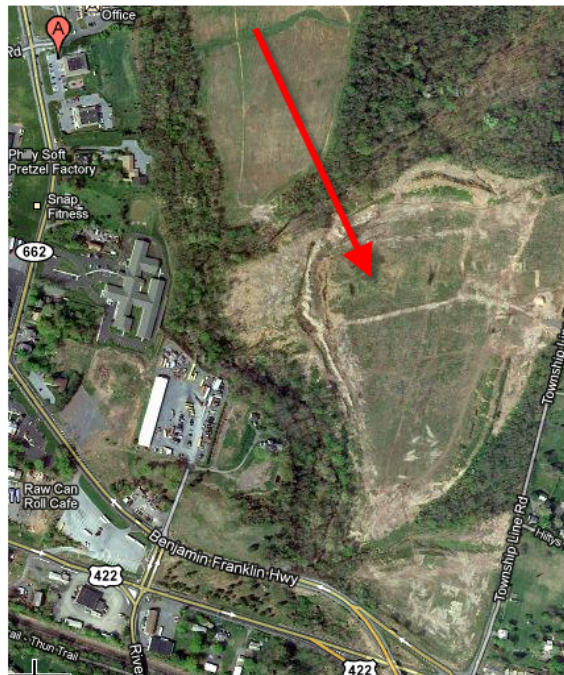
Gilbert made it clear that he was speaking for himself and not the entire council when explaining why he chose to resign.

He said the breaking point for him was the insistence of Tornetta to apply the 40 percent residential component to the parcel and the township's acceptance of that idea.

"That doesn't mean 60 percent is going to be commercial, because you've got wetlands in there," Gilbert said.

When considering land that can't be developed and space for infrastructure, what's left is at best 30 percent commercial and 40 percent residential, he said.

Gilbert also took exception to the supervisors' recommendation that the overlay district apply to the entire highway commercial corridor rather than just the Tornetta parcel.



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"It goes against everything we've worked for," he said of the advisory panel. "We've worked hard for commercial infrastructure in the township."

The advisory council had hoped for a completely commercial area, but later suggested residential development could only begin after at least 25 percent of planned commercial use was constructed.

Residential units could then be added in increments as commercial development progressed further.

Amity supervisors Chairman Robert R. Yanos said after a recent township meeting that many of the advisory council's ideas were enacted. He attributed the resignations to frustration over the economy and the township's inability to attract new businesses as a result.

"The economy slowed, and we're not accomplishing anything because no real estate is being sold," Yanos said.

Elsas, one of the remaining advisory council members, asked supervisors whether the council should be reorganized with new members or changed to a more informal panel.

Yanos said "everything is on the table" regarding the advisory council's future.

"Membership, organization, we're open for any ideas," he said.

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