

E. Hempfield Twp. considers apartment proposal

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A proposal to build a large apartment complex in East Hempfield has not garnered a consensus of support from township officials, but the developer, W. Edwin Miller, says he will continue to pursue the project.

About a dozen residents attended the East Hempfield Planning Commission meeting Wednesday, giving Miller his first public feedback since he proposed several months ago to amend the township zoning ordinance so he can proceed with his plans to build a six-story apartment building surrounded by 29 townhomes.

The problem is that in seven meetings since April 10, Miller has not asked the planning commission to take action on anything.

Miller presented an "overview of proposed amendment" that, if adopted, would permit his apartment complex. But Miller didn't have an actual legal draft of such an amendment for the commission to take action on.

"Because of the way this is drafted, it is not in the form of a proposed ordinance. I would not feel comfortable taking any action on this tonight," planning commission member John Bingham said.

The discussion on Miller's amendment was tabled at least until the next planning commission meeting.

However, it was the project itself—which hasn't been officially submitted

to the township—that dominated the discussion.

Most of the residents in attendance opposed Miller's plan to build the 250-unit complex at the southwest corner of Marietta Pike and Centerville Road because the area is too congested and heavily traveled by traffic already.

"I've been hit twice backing out of my driveway since they spent all that money fixing the intersection (of Centerville and Marietta). We don't need any more traffic there" said Donald Haines of Marietta Pike.

But at least two residents and some planning commission members think a high-density, land-thrifty apartment complex in East Hempfield might be a good idea.

Tom Prather, owner of the nearby Dutch Apple Dinner Theater on Centerville Road, said the site is going to be developed, it is just a question of what fits in that residential area.

"You can't stop more traffic from coming into East Hempfield, it is going to happen," Prather said, "But can't we look ahead to the future and see what this is going to be? You can't rent an apartment in East Hempfield and here are some people who have a vision for the future."

Ann Marie Johnston of Faulkner Drive said she found out how hard it was to find a nice, sizable apartment in East Hempfield when she moved here several years ago and hadn't yet purchased a home.

"I agree that East Hempfield does not have a lot of rental opportunities, but I don't think this site is the best one," Johnston said.

Although the Marietta Pike site is Miller's first choice for the complex, Miller has evaluated eight other sites in East Hempfield where an apartment complex could be built if the zoning ordinance is amended. Two other sites are adjacent to the Giant supermarket shopping center on Centerville Road. The other six sites are in the area of Park City Center or along Rohrerstown Road, near Stauffers of Kissel Hill and Lowe's Home Improvement Center.

Planning commission member Keith Jalco said the zoning amendment should be discussed before there's debate about the location of such an apartment complex.

"I think the idea has a lot of merit—to stop sprawl, conserve water—but I think we have gotten caught up in this specific site," Falco said.

