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Second S.U. supervisor opposes zoning change for business park

By Amy Karpinsky, Herald-Standard
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South Union Township Supervisor Rock Coville is joining fellow township Supervisor Thomas Frankhouser in opposing a zoning change for the Fayette Business Park.

The Fayette County Redevelopment Authority is asking for a change from manufacturing to business so that a doctor's office/clinic can move into the park, located on Route 40 across from the Holiday Inn.

Coville and Frankhouser oppose the change, noting the property is located in a KOZ, a tax-free zone, and would provide an unfair advantage for the doctor and clinic. Since the park is located in South Union Township, which has its own zoning, it's up to the supervisors to approve any zoning changes.

Frankhouser had earlier expressed his opposition to the move. Coville joined with him on Friday, noting, "It just isn't fair." He added, "There isn't any way I could support that."

Coville said he would like to take a step backward and not have the KOZ property in that location at all. He added that if there is any way that the land could be taken out of the KOZ, he would be in favor of changing the zoning to business.

The township's third supervisor, Robert Schiffbauer had earlier said he could be persuaded to change the zoning if the business is going to hire a substantial number of employees and provide a large capital investment. Schiffbauer also suggested collecting money, in lieu of taxes, for road

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improvements.

Meanwhile, Fayette County Commissioners Sean M. Cavanagh and Ronald M. Nehls said they favor the change and would like to discuss the issue with the supervisors.

"Things are happening there. There is a lot of momentum," Cavanagh said of the business park.

Cavanagh said the county is moving forward. He said the population is up, number of businesses in the county are up and more than 3,000 jobs have been created in the last few years.

"It's not by accident. It's by design," Cavanagh said. "This park has 'big mo,' momentum."

Nehls said he thinks manufacturing at the site is "ludicrous."

"We need to come together to get the park where it needs to be with zoning," Nehls said.

Unlike Cavanagh and Nehls, commission chairman Vincent A. Vicites said he is against changing the zoning simply to allow businesses to move there. He echoed the comments made earlier by Schiffbauer calling for a litmus test to determine if a zoning change is warranted.

Vicites said in the KOZ, it's a case-by-case basis.

"The most important thing is if you give a tax incentive, you have to create jobs," he said.

The 277-acre South Union Township business park on Route 40 is a mixed-use site, with business, manufacturing and residential zones included in it. Because the majority of the business property is filled or committed to projects, Raymond C. Polaski, executive director of the redevelopment authority, is asking for manufacturing property to be rezoned.

To date, a Super 8 Motel and the Terry McMillen engineering office are located in the park on the business zone. Soon, construction is planned for new Fayette County CareerLink and Fayette County Mental Health/Mental Retardation buildings, also in the business zone.

Polaski has said that without a zoning change, growth in the park will slow or cease. He said there aren't any remaining parcels large enough to support the proposals he has received.

According to information from Polaski, so far 25 new jobs have been created at the site.

"We need to create a lot more," Vicites said.

During Thursday's meeting of the commissioners, Cavanagh said he recently met with U.S. Rep. John Murtha, D-Johnstown, who plans to bring \$5 million for infrastructure in the park. Cavanagh said the proposed clinic has a \$3 million project, but without a change in zoning, it can't occur.

Cavanagh asked if any businesses have located in KOZ areas, Nehls quickly pointed out that Duke Energy in German Township is in a KOZ. Vicites, who was the point man for the project, said it will provide 750 construction jobs in 18 months and 25 permanent jobs when it opens next summer. He said the project is a \$420 to \$450 million investment.

Cavanagh suggested that a solution for the business park could be to take away the KOZ designation. He said maybe the solution is to change a law.

"Laws are made to be changed," he said.

The discussion began when the commissioners voted to award a \$5,000 contract for geo-technical and environmental study for the proposed site of the MH/MR building to Benatec Associates, the lowest responsible bidder for the project.

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