

Harlem Twp. trustees pass rezoning measure

NEWS

Residents have 30 days for referendum

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As Harlem Township trustees voted Tuesday on a rezoning measure, opponents to the measure, Brittany Bowers, left, and Susi Perry, right, hold a tight grip on each other's hand as they await the outcome of the vote.

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She said it will be 419 feet of privacy fence before changing over to chain link fence.

Bowers was also concerned about a stormwater retention area at the back of the property that already floods. She said the area floods onto her property and with a retention pond, it will only get worse.

The development team told her there would be a detention pond that would contain the runoff and then slowly release it naturally.

Trustees Robert Singer and David Jackson both voted in favor of the rezoning measure.

Before the vote was taken to approve or deny the measure, Trustee Jerry Paul made a statement in which he said he had no problem with self-storage since he was in the boat and RV business himself. He said throughout the process, he tried to form his opinion on article four of the Harlem Township Zoning Code "under the criteria for approval."

By a 2-1 vote Tuesday, Harlem Township Board of Trustees approved a measure rezoning 13 acres of property on Francher Road from agricultural to planned commercial.

The proposed use of the land is a 500-unit self-serve kiosk storage facility that will not be staffed.

Jim Gehring and Jeff Barr's, the applicants requesting the rezoning measure, responded to the concerns expressed by the local residents opposed to the rezoning.

"I am the property right next door to the proposed site," said Brittney Bowers. "We the community, have started a petition online. We have over 200 signatures already. We are prepared to do a referendum ... I've already spoken to the lawyers."

In a previous report, Bowers said the proposed storage facility plans show an 800-foot long privacy fence that will run along her driveway.

Paul said the proposed project was larger than any of the current commercial businesses in the area. He also talked about an additional 300-plus homes that were to be built in the area.

"This is the most populated area in our township," he said. "Fancher Road is already a major corridor for east-west traffic through our township."

Paul also spoke to concerns about the drainage of the proposed project that includes a detention pond that slowly releases water to prevent flooding. He said the water eventually drains out, but has nowhere to go because the area it will drain to is a bog full of cattails.

"As an elected official of this township, it is my duty to represent the common interest of our residents," Paul said. "I think their concerns are reasonable and legitimate in this situation. In my view, a commercial project of this magnitude in that area would not promote health, safety, and the welfare of our community as a whole, and especially for the residents that live there."

Trustees told residents they have 30 days for a referendum before the rezoning measure becomes permanent.

After the vote to approve the rezoning measure, Bowers said she would call the attorney to start the referendum process.

"We're ready to take care of it," she said. "I was inspired by Mr. Paul's words and very saddened by the lack of acknowledgment of the community by the other two (trustees)."

Alice Yuhas told The Gazette the citizens of Harlem Township do not want the storage facility.

"They want to maintain their rural town character that is in our Harlem Township Constitution," she said. "It's even on the website."

However, not everyone at the rezoning hearing was against the approval of the measure.

Jim Wheeler, a 40-year resident of the township, said he was a proponent of the rezoning, and during the February meeting, said he'd be "tickled to death if a big commercial place moved in next to him."

"The area that it's in, there is a ton of commercial around there," he said. "The mobile home community brought in some newer trailers and hopefully they will continue to clean it up and want to use the storage facility."

Wheeler said it seemed to be a good fit for the community.

Dennis McCann, the owner of the property, said the sale of the land to Jim Gehring and Jeff Barr, the applicants seeking to have the property rezoned, was contingent on the approval of the rezoning. He said he personally did not farm the land but leased it out to a farmer in the area.

"This is the last year to farm it," he said. "However, if they go to a referendum, I'll probably let them come in and farm it this year."

McCann said he also owned the commercial land next door, which he said was up for sale.