

COVER STORY



Secor Rd., a main corridor through the township, has various uses: residential, office and commercial.

Plans for the future

As the township considers changing the future use map, residents speak out on the proposed Wal-Mart development

BY CURTIS ZIMMERMANN
Bedford Now

Another round in the fight over the plan to bring a Wal-Mart to the township was fought Dec. 9 at the Bedford Township Planning Commission's public workshop to discuss changes to the master plan's future land use map.

This battle was a long time coming. When the planning commission first adopted a new master plan in June, the future land use map was the most controversial aspect. Even commissioners who approved it said it would need to be updated.

The map, which officials insist is only a small

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— Dennis Rabb,
a leader of Bedford Watch

portion of the whole plan, gives probable future uses for land in the entire township but does not rezone the land.

The map shows the empty parcel of land owned by the Whitman family at the corner of Lewis Ave. and Sterns Rd. as designated for parks and recreation, but the land is zoned for commercial and residential uses. The family announced last month that it has an option to sell the land to Wal-Mart.

At the Dec. 9 meeting, the commission presented a new map to the public that said that the land should be designated mixed residential/office/commercial. This designation, according to the language in the master plan, is intended to allow residential, office and low-density commercial uses outside of the township's village centers.

Many residents gave passionate speeches for why they would like to see the area continue to be designated for parks and recreation. They cited a need for keeping the open spaces in Bedford free of development, the need for more park facilities and strong anti-Wal-Mart feelings.

“There's no parks within a mile in each direction, if not more than that,” said Tony Quayle, who lives on Sterns Rd. directly across from the

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Whitman's property. “There's heavy residential all around there and we strongly feel that a park should be located there.”

Dennis Rabb, a resident of Indian Rd. who has been one of the leaders of an organization called Bedford Watch that has been strongly against the coming of Wal-Mart in the township, spoke about the problems of suburban sprawl.

“There's a small minority in this community that would like to make this the poster city for sprawl,” Rabb said. “Every year 400,000 acres are chewed up by residential and commercial devel-

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Plan (cont.)

opment in this country. In a recent report released by the American Farmland Trust, approximately 70 percent of private farmland is in the path of development. Unless there's natural barriers put in place to stop that kind of sprawl, it will continue to happen and chew up our land. This particular area of Bedford Township will look no different from Toledo in 20 years unless there are natural barriers put in to stop that. Those natural barriers would be parks, wetlands and green space."

Rabb tried to explain how he believes large commercial development would hurt the community.

"We've been given the notion that on that corner a large commercial development would generate \$3 to \$5 million (a year). While that's perhaps correct in terms of sales tax, that money doesn't go to this community — it goes to Lansing. All that large commercial development does is redistribute that wealth and redistribute that money from one location to another. ... If a park were on that site, it would only logically increase the value of residential areas surrounding it."

Mike LaVoy of Temperance spoke against Wal-Mart because he said he feels that the city has already breached too far into the township.

"If we want to see a deer, we're going to have to watch it on TV because pretty soon we're not going to see it here anymore," LaVoy said.

Not one person spoke in favor of the big box store coming to Bedford Township during the meeting.

Michelle Bork of Temperance, who said she was at many of the master plan meetings, said that the land should be used for mixed-use commercial purposes.

Gail Keane said that Bedford Township is no longer a rural area. She said that developers, when they build subdivisions, should provide parks and recreation areas for residents.

Keane said after the meeting that she feels voters already made the decision to bring growth when Proposal A was passed, which lowered property taxes in the state of Michigan in 1994. She said the township needs to provide services to the people who have moved here.

"Nobody cares unless it's in their back yard, then they've got a problem," Keane said. "Where were all these people who don't want the Wal-Mart when (Tom) Huner wanted to put the subdivision in to the east of the railroad tracks in Temperance?"

Planning commission Chairman Greg

Stewart said after the meeting that the commission will try to look at the opinions of everybody on the subject equally.

"Every individual should be heard, and every individual should understand that their weight is equal," Stewart said. "So if one person has a vested interest in developing, his input is no more equal and no less equal than someone who wants to not develop that land."

Stewart said that the final map will not be based on the wishes of the planning commission, but that it is trying to interpret what the majority of the township sees as the ideal community.

"It's not what I feel is right," Stewart said. "It's what I feel the community has talked to us about and has said is correct."

Revising the future land use map is a lengthy process. From this point, the planning commission must take into account and discuss the public's commentary at a future meeting. From there, it will go to the township board, which will decide if the process can move forward. Revised copies will be sent to the surrounding communities of Erie, Whiteford, Ida, LaSalle and Summerfield townships as well as the Monroe County Planning Commission.

The townships have 65 days to respond and Monroe County has 75 to 90. After that, the planning commission will hold a public hearing to ratify the changes.

Township Planning/Zoning Coordinator Dennis Jenkins estimated that hearing could be held in March, 2003.

A work in progress

The future land use map was created as part of the master plan through a series of public workshops facilitated by Wade-Trim Associates.

At the workshops, people were broken up into groups and given maps to determine their own visions. Wade-Trim then compiled composite maps that represented all of the views.

On the three composites that were made, the Lewis Ave. and Sterns Rd. property had different uses. On one it was single-family residential, on another it was commercial and on the third it was designated as park land. At another public hearing, Wade-Trim passed out surveys and the people present chose what the final map would look like.

Planning department officials said that 107 people participated in the various meetings.

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Plan (cont.)

Since passing the master plan in June, the planning commission members have discussed possible revisions to the future land use map numerous times.

Through the course of these discussions, they came up with 21 possible changes to the map (see sidebar for list of changes). The minutes from these meetings indicate that commissioners discussed the property at the corner of Lewis Ave. and Sterns Rd. in great detail.

At the Aug. 7 meeting, when the subject of changes was first brought up, Arnold Jennings stated that most of the changes would be minor with the exception of the Lewis Ave. and Sterns Rd. property. Jennings stated that since a good portion of the property was already zoned commercial, it should be designated commercial on the map.

The topic came up again on Sept. 4, when the commission decided to go with residential/office/commercial. In the minutes, it states that Stewart said "the mixed residential/office/commercial designation is a compromise and compromise leads to mediocrity."

Stewart explained his comments on this subject after the meeting on Dec. 9. "I personally and six out of seven group workshops, did not believe that is appropriate for parkland. ... There's a correct use for it. We have to find what works in the master plan around the area, what works for the people

and the retail around the area."

When Jenkins first presented the map to the members of the commission at a meeting on Dec. 4, Judy Frankowski of Temperance asked if the map was being changed for the purpose of allowing a Wal-Mart to be constructed at the corner of Lewis Ave. and Sterns Rd.

Stewart assured her that wasn't the reason for the change.

"When we approved the master plan we said there were specific things in the map, not the plan, that didn't reflect what was happening and was already out of date," Stewart said.

The future of the plan

While the future land use map will change, the 111-page master plan will remain the same. Main aspects of the plan call for the township to retain its rural character over the next 20 years and has Toledo designated as the commercial center for Bedford Township residents.

Officials were quick to point out at the meeting that the process does not stop when the future land use map is completed. They said that implementing the master plan requires revising and passing ordinances and could take years to carry out.

"It doesn't end with the master plan," Julie Johnston of Wade-Trim Associates told the crowd at the end of the meeting. "Your involvement is very important."



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Residents' views on proposed Wal-Mart differ

By **CURTIS ZIMMERMANN**
and **DAVE MOORE**
Bedford Now

Do the residents of Bedford Township want a Wal-Mart?

With much talk in the community centered around the Whitman family's proposal to sell the vacant land at the corner of Lewis Ave. and Sterns Rd. to Wal-Mart, often the most vocal opinions have been heard.

But conversations with random residents, half Lambertville residents and half Temperance residents, revealed that when it comes to the Wal-Mart issue, opinions vary.

Of the 20 people asked, 12 were in favor; three were against and five people were undecided.

In favor

Residents who are in favor gave a variety reasons for why they would like to see it built.

"They've got the right to make a living," said Harold Haise of Temperance. "You've got everything else here already. The people are rolling in their graves with all the alcohol sold in town here. Bring 'em on."

A few residents were in favor of it because it would bring new jobs into the township.

"I'm in favor of it. Students need money to participate in school activities," said Marilyn Rollman of Temperance. "They could earn that money at Wal-Mart. We have a lot of groups to support the kids in their activities, but it's hard to keep up."

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stand why people whose property was near it were so opposed.

"They want lower taxes, but they don't want to bring anything in to help lower the taxes," Wiles said.

Some of the people surveyed just like the company:

"I love Wal-Mart," said Debbie Miazgowicz of Temperance. She added that she does feel bad for the people whose back yards it will line up against.

"Wal-Mart is awesome," said Tom Burnep of Temperance. "Now it takes like 45 minutes to get to the one in Monroe."

"I can't think of anything besides Wal-Mart I'd like to see," said Jim Slagy of Lambertville.

Against

Those who are against it cited the company's non-union policies and the increased amount of traffic it would bring as reasons why they wouldn't want to see it built in Bedford:

"My family and I moved here to be in a small-town atmosphere, to get away from Wayne County," said Lori Bolin, a Temperance resident. "We take a drive if we need something. It doesn't need to be around the corner from us. It's family time in the car together.

"Also, Wal-Mart isn't union.

"It will bring more crime and problems. You don't know how long I waited to get onto Lewis (Ave.) today. With all these new subdivisions, the traffic's bad enough."

Undecided

Joe Fry, who just moved to Temperance last March, didn't

feel he had knew enough about it to have an opinion.

"I guess I don't really care one way or the other," he said. "I can see both sides. ... It would be nice to have it here so we wouldn't have to drive to Bowling Green or Monroe."

Laurie Fulkerson doesn't feel

she has enough information to make an informed decision. She doesn't think that Bedford has the road infrastructure to support the trucks and traffic that a Wal-Mart would bring, but as a strong advocate of property rights, she believes the Whitmans should be able to sell their property.

Some residents said they liked the proposed location at the corner of Lewis and Sterns because of the draw it would have from Toledo.

"If Toledo people want to come to a Wal-Mart they can come to Michigan," said Jeff Bowling of Lambertville.

Don Wiles of Temperance is in favor it and believes that the Whitman family has the right to sell it to whomever they want. He also didn't under-

My husband works at Ford. Union is a big deal in this family."

"That means more commercialism. So many stores aren't necessary," said Debra Tromoehlen of Temperance. "There are already enough stores. That means hurting the environment. People should shop in existing stores."

"There's enough congestion as it is," said Hattie Bee, a longtime resident of Temperance.