

Rezoning issue tangled in big-box fears

I am writing as a lifelong Bedford Township resident. I am not writing on behalf of the Bedford Township Board. The thoughts expressed here are entirely my own.

Because of my position as one of seven Bedford Township trustees,

I have been reluctant to comment on the Whitman rezoning issues until now. Some of the tactics used by the opposition are insulting, offensive and vindictive — specifically, labeling the rezoning as PRO Wal-Mart,

passing off pure speculation as established facts, and character assassination of the Whitman family.

Reasonable people ought to be able to disagree on an issue without resorting to personal attacks that we have all witnessed regarding this issue. Shame on us as a civilized society if we consider behavior like this to be acceptable. In my view, the underlying issue is how to balance the rights of the property owners involved — the surrounding neighbors and the Whitman family.

Each property owner has equal rights regarding the use of his or her property. The question then is how those property rights are protected or balanced for each party.



Paul Francis

Bedford Now
guest columnist

Parties on both sides definitely have merit in their arguments. We are blessed to live in a society where we are governed by laws and precedents, and are not subject to the whims of politicians or angry mobs as other societies are.

One of the precedents relevant to this issue is the use of transitional zoning to balance the rights of property owners who may have differing objectives for the use of their respective properties. The United States Supreme Court has established the precedent of transitional zoning as an acceptable method of balancing the rights of property owners.

Based on this precedent and the recommendations of various land-use experts, the township board on Dec. 2, 2008, granted the request by the Whitman family to rezone five of the six parcels presented in their plan. In my view, the package presented by the Whitman family was a balanced plan, which substantially complied with our master plan by utilizing transitional zoning ranging from residential (RM2 and RME) to PBO (Professional Business Office) on the western side of the property to commercial along Lewis Ave. on the eastern side of the property. The rezoning requested for the center parcel (No. 6) — a change from residential to commercial — was rejected by a six to one majority, even though it was buffered on the western side

by transitional zoning indicated above.

Subsequently, on Jan. 20, 2009, the township board administratively rezoned the remaining center parcel (No. 6) from residential to PBO (Professional Business Office) by a six to one majority. I opposed that action because I do not believe the township board should arbitrarily rezone someone's property without his or her request to do so, and no such request was made.

So, here we are today, about to vote on whether to approve or reject the township board rezoning actions. The main focus of those who are opposed to the rezoning is to define the issue as pro- or anti-Wal-Mart. In my view, the vote on May 5 is NOT A WAL-MART OR BIG BOX ISSUE. The fact remains that a big box store could be built on the Whitman property as it was zoned before the rezoning action. In other words, if a big box was the intent of the Whitman family at this time, it would not be necessary to request any rezoning of their property.

Check the facts, and you will come to the same conclusion. Three or four years ago, a big-box development was proposed due to interest expressed by Wal-Mart. But now, that concept is NOT being proposed by the Whitman family, and to harangue the citizens of Bedford Township constantly using anti-Wal-Mart/big box information amounts