

4ASATURDAY,
JUNE 9, 2007Tom Chulski, editorial page editor
phone: 240-5760
e-mail: tom@monroenews.com**The Monroe Evening News**
A tradition of community service since 1825**OUR VIEW****► To the point**

The township's decision to appeal the Albring Farms court ruling is a mistake; instead, the case should prompt a re-thinking of township land use priorities.

Bedford is risking too much with appeal

Bedford Township's zoning challenges are again in court.

The township board has decided to appeal a March ruling by Monroe County Circuit Court Judge Michael W. LaBeau that allowed a 450-home subdivision called Albring Farms through the rezoning of 80 acres from agricultural to residential.

On the surface, it might seem reasonable that township board members ought to be able to maintain agricultural zoning when they want to. That's the point of zoning. The community decided that the Albring Farms land should be used for agricultural purposes decades ago, and the zoning has remained unchanged.

In addition, 450 new homes will put added pressure on Erie Rd., which was designed as a farm road and already is inadequate to meet current suburban needs.

Unfortunately, it's not that simple. Bedford repeatedly has changed zoning from agricultural to residential at the request of developers, including recently for property at Sterns and Smith Rds. There are subdivisions on both sides of the Albring Farms property.

It's not reasonable for a community to allow some developers to rezone property and not others. That's essentially what Judge LaBeau concluded.

Compounding the problem for the township, it has been negotiating with the development company, Bedford Partners, for several years. According to Mark Brant, one of the co-owners of Bedford Partners, township officials have reached tentative agreement several times on deals that included the developer helping to pay for improvements to Erie Rd.

But the township later backed out of the agreements, according to Mr. Brant, only to return to the

table and ask for more.

Requiring developers to pay for some infrastructure improvements is the smart and prudent thing to do. But Michigan law is specific about what the township can ask for, and the developers have agreed to more than the law requires.

By appealing the March decision, the Bedford board appears to be throwing good money after bad. If the township loses again, the developers won't be bound by the earlier offers. The township could end up with 450 new homes and fewer concessions from the developers. It also could end up paying the developers' court costs, which were not included in the March ruling.

That doesn't serve anyone's interests.

It would be different if this case followed a community-wide initiative to change the course of Bedford's growth. Many in the community are beginning to question the township's collective vision for its future. Rapid growth for more than a decade has dramatically changed the landscape from a mostly rural community to mostly suburban.

The debate over a Wal-Mart proposal at Lewis and Sterns — sidetracked for the time being by another court decision this year — is another example.

It looks like it's time for Bedford to revisit its land use planning, drawing the community together for a thoughtful discussion of the community's future.

That could help lay the groundwork for controlling growth, giving the township more tools for negotiating with developers.

But it's too late to bring the Albring Farms case into that kind of discussion. The judge has ruled, and the township should make the best deal possible with the developers and move on.

Bedford risking much with zoning challenge

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6/22/07