

Local

LOWER ALLEN TOWNSHIP

## Residents weigh in on Liberty Forge development

By [Barbara Phillips Long, Shippensburg Bureau Chief](#),  
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Lower Allen and Cumberland County residents showed Monday night there are more than two sides to consider when making a zoning change.

Township residents asked about water, emergency medical services, traffic on Lisburn Road, funding for development costs, sewer and more.

An Upper Allen resident expressed concern about the amount of development in the area. Other people asked questions about future tax rates and questioned the numbers presented at the meeting.

And a man from Mechanicsburg advised Lower Allen Township commissioners that too much development in the township would make the area look just like New Jersey.

The hearing, held at Christ Community Church's auditorium to provide more room for the audience, attracted about 200 people and lasted longer than the 10 p.m. scheduled ending. Liberty Forge Golf Course has proposed a zoning amendment that would allow developers to build multifamily residential units up to 75 feet tall in exchange for keeping at least half the land in "open space." That open space could include golf courses (including the pro shop on the golf course) and other recreation facilities, which may be open to the public but aren't required to be free or open. If federal guidelines are followed, the units — either luxury condos or townhouses — could be age restricted to senior citizens.

John Titzel, president of the township board of commissioners, and other township officials emphasized that the hearing was about the proposed ordinance, not any proposed development plan.

The testimony of Dennis Glackin, who showed slides of possible development plans and statistics about the financial impact of the development, led people to comment on possible development plans instead of the zoning amendment.

The Liberty Forge zoning amendment, which, in this case, is an amendment for an overlay, which would allow a developer to follow different rules for a section in the R-2 rural residential area in Lower Allen. The amendment requires the developer to provide public water and sewer.

### In Focus

Various issues raised by Lower Allen Township officials, representatives of Liberty Forge Golf Course and speakers at a public hearing concerning a proposed zoning change Monday are listed below.

- What are the advantages and disadvantages of having taller buildings?

Dennis Glackin, speaking for the Liberty Forge Golf Course developer, said the taller buildings will allow more housing units on less land. There will be less "impervious coverage" — land that's built on or paved — so there will be more ground that can absorb rainwater.

Vehicles would be parked on the first level in the proposed buildings envisioned by the Liberty Forge developer, said developer Luke Grumbine.

Neighboring property owners worry about seeing tall buildings from the road or nearby property.

Township officials said the Lisburn Community Fire Co. is geared toward fighting house fires, and the company would need additional equipment to deal with 75-foot-tall buildings. Grumbine has said the taller buildings would probably be constructed of steel and masonry to meet building codes; the construction would not be wood-frame housing construction.

- What about water and sewer?

The Lower Allen Township Authority proposed basic specifications for sewer for a development such as the one

During the discussion of the effects of the Liberty Forge proposal on tax revenue, Glackin talked about how much more property tax income the township, West Shore School District and Cumberland County would receive. The numbers were based on a cost of \$650,000 per housing unit.

Jan Jarrett was skeptical about the likelihood of housing of that cost being in demand. She said the property tax revenue figures presented by Liberty Forge were “based on hope.”

Glackin said the price per unit was necessary to recoup the cost of the water line. Several township residents asked if that amount was realistic, particularly given the day’s news about the bankruptcy of Lehman Brothers, the purchase of Merrill Lynch by Bank of America and the financial troubles of insurance giant AIG.

At one point, Titzel asked the crowd how many favored the development and how many were opposed. Many more hands went up when he asked who was opposed.

Despite a request for quiet at the beginning, occasionally comments elicited clapping or murmurs from the crowd.

Several speakers favored the zoning amendment, because, they said, they want property taxes to stay under control.

Other speakers asked how the township would pay for its share of improvements needed for a development with more than 500 dwelling units.

The principal points raised by Glackin on behalf of developer Luke Grumbine included the addition of water and sewer service to a section of the township that is currently dependent on wells and septic systems; the increased tax revenue from an age-restricted community that would not significantly increase school populations; the retention of open space for residents inside and outside the Liberty Forge development; and the ability of other developers to benefit from the zoning amendment.

Amanda Brown pressed the commissioners to assure the public that all costs for water, sewer and emergency services would be borne only by the developer.

Commissioner Dan Christ said some expenses might have to be paid by the township, but a bond issue could be used to pay for some of the costs rather than a tax increase.

Glackin said the developer would have to provide water and sewer service and pay for road improvements specified by the township and PennDOT.

Brown ran out of time to complete her follow-up questions and was gavelled down.

Liberty Forge was suggesting. The authority wants a 30-foot easement along the sewer line. Whether the easement would be part of “open space” has not been addressed.

A water line would have to be brought in to any proposed development put in under the zoning amendment. Grumbine said he’s contacted Pennsylvania American Water regarding a water line, but no arrangements have been made because plans for the Liberty Forge development depend on adoption of the zoning ordinance and an approved plan.

Township officials are concerned about the difficulties of running a water line to that area of the township.

Township Manager Tom Vernau said in an interview about a week before the hearing that a lot of rock might have to be blasted out of the way before a water line had a clear path to the Liberty Forge area.

- Why does the amendment call for at least 75 acres?

“You need enough land to make development feasible,” Eby said. Glackin said the township already has an open space zoning provision that has never been used because it isn’t written in a way that makes it worthwhile to develop property using the “smart growth” approach of clustered housing to increase open space.

- How many multifamily homes could be built in the R-2 zone if the amendment passes?

Glackin said there was no exact estimate, because part of the area south of the Pennsylvania Turnpike in Lower Allen is already developed. But if other groups bought up the open land and developed it using the terms of the Liberty Forge zoning ordinance, he didn’t think builders would put in as many units as Liberty Forge is interested in building.

- Could nearby townships, including Fairview Township in York County and Upper Allen Township in Cumberland

The principal focus of speakers toward the end of the comment period was traffic on Lisburn Road, which is already heavily traveled by drivers seeking a way around traffic on Interstate 83 and a way around construction on Route 15.

County, also adopt the proposed zoning regulation?

Yes, although Glackin thought it was unlikely.

One woman asked if the developer could guarantee that land along Lisburn Road would not be subject to eminent domain if the zoning amendment was approved. Glackin said the road widening, if it ever happened, would be a township decision -- and the township could use eminent domain.

Several speakers also urged the township not to allow overdevelopment that would eliminate all open space, because they had moved to Cumberland County to escape heavy development.

Bob Shell of Mechanicsburg said he'd moved to the area from New Jersey two years ago.

"I've lived through this, folks," he said. He said that nationwide, there is a glut of housing, and "to increase your density is absolute folly."

Adriana Klick said she lived in Montgomery County, Md., before moving to Upper Allen Township and is skeptical of the tax revenue figures. She warned commissioners there would be "unforeseen consequences" of further development and said that if the luxury units at Liberty Forge failed to sell, the decline in price would affect property assessments throughout the region.

Her final comment, "Just because revenue increases doesn't mean taxes will drop," was met by applause from the crowd.

Paul Piccini asked what would happen to the project if the developer went bankrupt before all the luxury units were built.

Joseph Roe, a township resident for more than 30 years, said the people in the audience "were here to protest" the Liberty Forge proposal, but that there were many who hadn't come to the hearing who favored it.

"I beseech you to do the right thing and move into the 21st century," he said.

Commissioners closed the hearing after all the people who had stood in line to speak were done. In addition to Titzel, commissioners at the meeting included Lloyd Bucher, Dan Christ and Ped Young. Young is the liaison from the board to the township planning commission, but he is not a voting member of the commission.

Commissioner Ed Black was not at the hearing.

The commissioners have 45 days to consider the testimony at the hearing, but they can vote sooner on the zoning amendment.

John Mahoney, the attorney for the developer, told commissioners the developer would be willing to work with the township to clarify language in the amendment to meet some of the concerns raised at the meeting.

John Eby, planning and zoning coordinator for the township, said various letters and memoranda regarding the zoning amendment will be posted on the Lower Allen Township Web site.