

MIDDLETOWN

Supervisors oppose shopping center

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The obstacles keep mounting for Reedman/Toll Auto World owner Bruce Toll in his effort to replace the dealership's test track along Route 213 with a shopping center.

Part of the deal also includes Toll donating eight acres to Middletown for a new community center that would include space for the seniors association.

However, even though township officials originally brought up the idea of the land donation in conjunction with the shopping center, all five supervisors indicate they oppose the project. In addition, the supervisors have authorized township solicitor Mike Savona to speak in support of the township zoning hearing board's denial of variances needed for the project. Toll has appealed that denial to Bucks County court.

"I'm totally against this [project]," said Supervisor George Leonhauser at Tuesday night's meeting.

"I'm not for it. It would not work," added board member Chuck Thompson. "I don't think the seniors want to drive through this complex [shopping center] to get to their center. So far, this has gone over like a lead balloon."

The supervisors spoke in response to questions from resident Michelle MacKay, one of many in the nearby Langhorne Gardens section who oppose the project. They fear it would mean a lot more traffic and noise, in addition to other negative impacts.

"I personally have never favored it," said Supervisor Robert McMonagle.

Toll declined to comment when reached Wednesday.

Supervisors Chairwoman Lisa Pflaumer did not attend Tuesday night's meeting. When reached Wednesday, she said the idea for a shopping center and donation of land for a community center came up more than a year ago when Toll and township officials first met to talk about future uses for the test track.

Pflaumer said she originally supported the idea but changed her mind when it became clear some sticking points weren't going to be resolved. One of the major sticking points is that Toll wants to make a 150,000-square-foot big box store part of the shopping center and a township ordinance prohibits any new stores more than 80,000 square feet.

"I'm not thrilled about the idea of changing a law we just enacted," said Supervisor Jasper Caro.

Township officials are pursuing another option for a community center, said Pflaumer, who added she couldn't be more specific because there might be legal ramifications. It's time to leave the Reedman/Toll idea behind, she said.

"Sometimes, what seems like the best option at a certain time turns out to not be the best option and that is what happened here," said Pflaumer. "I'm not in favor of moving forward with this [Reedman/Toll] alternative. We've found another viable option that will work for the community as a whole and we are pursuing that."