

# Burlington County Times

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## Marathon meeting results in rezoning of land

*By: MARK ZIMMARO*

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*Pemberton Township Council approved a plan that would allow senior housing in north end of town.*

**PEMBERTON TOWNSHIP** - After nearly seven hours of heated debate, the Township Council adopted a plan that would allow senior housing in the north end of town.

More than 100 residents crammed into Room 10 of the municipal building Wednesday night and more than half stayed well into Thursday morning as they and elected officials argued about the rezoning of the Greenberg dairy farm on North Pemberton Road to make way for a possible major residential development.

The council voted 3-2 in favor of the senior cluster overlay plan, to the dismay of Pemberton First representatives, a grass-roots group that is opposed to developing the farm.

"I thought the people had a voice and I thought this was a government that heard the people, but obviously I was wrong," said Eric Houwen, who lives on North Pemberton Road.

Township officials said that there is no known developer and that the land could remain farmland, if that is what the owner desires. But the majority of residents who live in the area strongly oppose a senior development.

"I wonder whose vision this is?" said Councilman Rick Prickett, a member of Pemberton First who voted against the ordinance, along with Tom Inge. "I'm sad to say, as eloquent and passionate as the residents were tonight, I don't think anyone was listening."

Pending county and state Department of Environmental Protection approval, water and sewer lines can be extended to the Greenberg farm to accommodate high-density housing.

According to planner Rick Ragan, of Ragan Design Group in Medford, a maximum of 270 units can be built on the land, with half of the 134 acres being preserved. If constructed the development would have a 300-foot buffer from North Pemberton Road. A 62-acre portion of the farm that was originally included in the plan was eliminated from development during the meeting.

Ragan also said he would expect a senior housing development to generate significant revenue.

"I understand that Pemberton First is clearly not in favor, but that doesn't mean this is not beneficial to current and future residents of the township," said Ragan, who presented an overview of the township's master plan, which was amended for the first time in 37 years. "The concept is to bring in some ratables that this town desperately needs, and I believe this would have a positive financial impact."

Councilwoman Sherry Scull explained her support for the measure.

"During our campaign we talked about the need to develop in Pemberton Township. We're not going to an extreme here, and this isn't going to happen overnight," Scull said.

Some residents at Wednesday's meeting also supported developing the land located at North Pemberton and Arney's Mount roads near Pemberton Borough.

"This is a master plan and not some hodgepodge plan," said Helen Kemp, a Planning Board member and real estate agent in town. "This is a major accomplishment for the township. I am for smart growth and that's what this plan is about."

Some residents said other parts of the 64-square-mile community should be developed first.

"We've had three years to do something about that shopping center in Browns Mills, but we want to invest in developing an area that doesn't need it," Inge said. "We don't need more housing. If you drive up and down almost any street, you will see at least one house on the block in foreclosure. This wasn't the residents' plan."

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