

Proposed asphalt plant violates zoning, resident says

By Joe Jenkins
Allied Forum

In Barkeyville, there is good news and there is bad news.

First the good news. A group of Barkeyville citizens spent two years in the late 1990s writing the Barkeyville Zoning Ordinance. The ordinance was developed with the help of Grove City's consulting firm Graney, Grossman and Ray. Its purpose was to protect the quality of life for Barkeyville residents while allowing for controlled business development within the borough. Protection of the local environment was wisely included in the ordinance, and businesses that produce air pollution were specifically prohibited from locating in Barkeyville. To quote the ordinance, "Any permitted principal and/or accessory business use shall ... not emit any noxious, toxic or corrosive fumes or gases nor shall it emit any offensive odors." This restriction was repeated two more times in the ordinance.

The borough zoning officer is the person entrusted with understanding and upholding the local ordinance. In fact, Pennsylvania code states rather bluntly that, "The zoning officer shall administer the zoning ordinance in accordance with its literal terms, and shall not have the power to permit any construction or any use or change of use which does not conform to the zoning ordinance."

Now the bad news. On New Years Eve, Barkeyville's zoning officer, Gary Dovey, granted a zoning permit to Glenn O. Hawbaker, Inc., permitting Hawbaker to construct a massive, coal-fired asphalt plant in Barkeyville. This development took place over a period of months - Hawbaker's permit application to the DEP was submitted in mid-October of last year. The zoning officer had at least two and a

half months to review both the zoning ordinance with its air pollution restrictions and Hawbaker's application with its declaration of expected air pollution emissions.

Hawbaker's DEP declarations indicate that the plant, if restricted, is expected to generate 212.21 tons of air pollutants each year with a staggering potential of 1,447.88 tons. This is not hundreds of tons of garbage dumped into a hole in the ground; this is garbage dumped into the air for people to breathe. It includes tons of extremely dangerous hazardous air pollutants, potentially cancer-causing volatile organic compounds, sulfur emissions, carbon monoxide gas, nitrogen emissions (smog) and tons of soot. These pollutants, will be distributed over a wide area that includes not only Barkeyville, but also Grove City, Harrisville, Wesley, Clintonville and everywhere in between. The emissions are associated with a long list of serious adverse health effects.

The air pollution issue is further complicated by the fact that the Hawbaker facility is rated to produce 560,000 tons of asphalt during its annual eight-month production season. At an average 22 tons per truckload, that equates to approximately 51,000 trucks hauling asphalt out and raw material in, or 318 diesel trucks per work day in addition to the already heavy truck traffic that Barkeyville endures.

Few people know that the lifetime cancer risk from diesel soot in Butler, Venango and Mercer counties exceeds the risk of all other air toxins tracked by the EPA and is about 10 times higher than the cancer risks from all other hazardous air pollutants combined. The massive Hawbaker facility, being constructed in Barkeyville's Keystone Opportunity Zone, will wear the local roads and pollute the local air

while paying no property tax and no state income tax - a pretty sweet deal for Hawbaker, but a bum deal for Barkeyville.

The Barkeyville citizens have done their civic duty, worked hard, sacrificed their time and energy and developed a zoning ordinance that would protect their small-town quality of life while allowing for appropriate economic growth. Yet, these good American citizens are now watching in disbelief as their carefully crafted ordinance is rudely brushed aside as if it were just a child's toy. Hawbaker, a \$100 million/year corporation is wasting no time converting a fallow Barkeyville field into a 27-acre point source for air pollution only 100 feet from the nearest resident.

Barkeyville has become a David facing a Goliath. Its population of about 225 people, many of them elderly, will have to endure elevated air pollution health threats and traffic congestion for the rest of their lives, or try to raise kids in this environment, or move away, despite the protections their zoning ordinance had provided for them. It appears that our local officials have failed us.

A group of area private citizens has voluntarily stepped forward to protect Barkeyville. We have formally appealed the zoning permit issued by the zoning officer, because we believe that it was issued illegally. There are a lot of questions that need to be answered. We need all the help we can get.

I would encourage your readers to visit our Web site, protectbarkeyville.org, where we have posted the public documents, Borough Council minutes, zoning ordinance, Hawbaker permit and DEP documents. I would also encourage them to attend a DEP Public Hearing at 7 p.m. March 8 at the Barkeyville Borough Building.