

# Residents voice plant concerns

## 120 attend hearing on asphalt facility

By **KRIS MILLER**  
Eagle Editor

BARKEYVILLE, Venango County — Owners spent more than two hours assuring residents that a new asphalt plant won't hurt air quality here, but residents weren't buying it.

Residents aired their concerns on March 8 during a state Department of Environmental Protection hearing at the Barkeyville Church of God on Route 8. The meeting was moved there at the last minute because the crowd of about 120 people was too large to fit in the borough building just down the street.

Plant owner Mike Hawbaker of Hawbaker Inc. presented information about the proposed plant and its air quality plan. DEP representatives also addressed questions from the residents and stated the plant has the agency's initial approval.

About 100 residents signed a petition to request the hearing. Some of the speakers at the hearing supported the plant for its economic development benefit but most at the hearing applauded when they heard residents speak against the plant.

Five residents filed an appeal Feb. 21 in Venango County Court which states the Barkeyville Zoning Hearing Board shouldn't have issued a permit which allowed the construction of the facility.

The asphalt plant bought 27 acres at 1041 Stevenson Road in Barkeyville and would become the second tenant of the Barkeyville Industrial Park. Construction began on the plant during the first week of February but was stopped by the appeal.

The issue caused more than 60 residents to pack the borough building March 6 for the regular council meeting. Two members of the three-member zoning hearing board resigned on March 6 and council

appointed two replacements.

The company bought the land from the Oil Regional Alliance, an economic development group that owns the 126-acre industrial park.

Hawbaker Inc. plans to build a hot mix asphalt plant on the property which will produce up to 560,000 tons of asphalt per year, according to its application to the DEP. The plant will burn oil, natural gas or propane to provide heat for drying the wet asphalt mixture, the application states.

Two main points are included in the residents' appeal, both dealing with zoning laws. The zoning ordinance states that an industry which emits noxious, toxic or corrosive fumes or gases should not be allowed as part of a principal industrial use, said William Coursen, a plaintiff in the lawsuit who lives about a mile from the industrial park.

But in the company's application to the DEP, it states that "heating, crushing, storing, conveying and loading the materials (at the plant) will emit from 200 to 1,500 tons of pollutants into the surrounding atmosphere each year of operation."

Also, the zoning officer at the time the zoning hearing board voted on this plan was an employee of Oil Regional Alliance, the owners of the industrial park. Gary Dobey has since quit working for the alliance and resigned as zoning officer Feb. 14, said Coursen.

Coursen was a member of the Barkeyville Planning Commission for 25 years and helped develop the comprehensive plan for the borough. He believes this plant doesn't belong in this area.

"All we're saying is this isn't appropriate tenant of the industrial park," he said. "I'm not taking issue with other tenants of the park."

Other residents are relieved the group has filed the appeal, Coursen said.

"From the comments I've heard, they're glad somebody is taking this on," he said.