

SCHOOL FIGHT

Clifton mayor, solicitor fire back at U.D. school officials

By **Loretta Rodgers**
Times Correspondent

CLIFTON HEIGHTS » Comments made by Upper Darby School Board members and a school district attorney during last week's finance and operations committee has raised the ire of Mayor Joe Lombardo and borough attorneys.

Clifton Heights officials were accused of creating "roadblocks" in reference to the proposed construction of a new middle school on North Springfield Road, resulting in the district paying \$20,000 to \$30,000 a month in legal fees and delaying the project one year.

"They are trying to intimidate us and it isn't going to work," Lombardo said. "We have done nothing to block them. The district has been trying to jam things down our throats and we are going to make them go through the proper steps. We are doing our jobs as elected officials. As far as I am concerned the district is creating its own roadblocks."

Lombardo said the project's traffic study is incomplete and the district has presented three plans that are basically similar. He added that the borough gave the district a "laundry list" of items to address that has yet to be completed.

"It is not our responsibility to hold their hand and tell them what they should do," Lombardo said. "They need to present a plan that works for our municipality within our guidelines as far as our building codes are concerned."

The proposed \$65 million 147,000 square-foot middle school is an absolute necessity, due to overcrowding at both Beverly Hills and Drexel Hill Middle Schools, according to district officials.

Other construction sites were considered, however, none were suitable due to restrictions or costs.

The property on North Springfield Road is owned by the Upper Darby School District and building at that location is ideal, said district officials.

Land development attorney Andrew Stoll, who is representing the district in this project, stated last week that interactions between the district and Clifton Heights have not been "typical."

"We have had some roadblocks from the municipality," Stoll said during last week's meeting. "We continue to move ahead despite the roadblocks and plan on building a school there."

Clifton Heights special attorney John McBlain wrote a letter to Stoll taking issue with the comments.

"During our involvement in this matter, the district has publicly presented the narrative that Clifton Heights has obstructed the land development process and has not been cooperative because the borough 'refuses to sit down' to discuss the district's design and 'refuses to answer questions in public,'" McBlain wrote. "The district asserts that this is not 'typical' in land development matters, with the implication being that the borough has acted in a way that contravenes its duties and responsibilities under the Pennsylvania Municipalities Code, or some other statute, regulation or court decision. This narrative of implied dereliction is false."

McBlain goes on to say the project in question is the largest in the history of the borough and will increase the daily population by 20 percent. The traffic generated by the school could add more than 1,000 daily vehi-

cle trips to a highly populated neighborhood, and increase the need for borough resources such as police protection.

"The borough is determined to ensure public confidence in whatever the outcome by ensuring transparency and avoiding backroom deals," wrote McBlain. "Contrary to what the district wants the public to believe, the borough has acted in good faith in evaluating the proposed land development plans."

Lombardo also stated that the district is costing themselves money by not having a separate project manager.

"The superintendent and Dr. (Greg) Manfre are not qualified to be project managers, as their degrees are in education, not engineering and architecture," Lombardo said. "Look, they gave been throwing stuff at us expecting us to rubber-stamp it, and that is not going to happen. We are committed to making them do due diligence and what is best for our residents in Clifton Heights, not the Upper Darby School District."



MEDIANEWS GROUP FILE PHOTO

The Upper Darby School District's move to build a new middle school on the Clifton Heights athletic fields continues to grind its way through the system.

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