

# Liberty Twp. holds hearing on POD

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[Plan includes commercial, residential development](#)

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In response to a request to rezone 190 acres of land along Sawmill Parkway between Clark-Shaw and Hyatts roads in Liberty Township, signs like this one that direct the public to visit [www.Ir4rg.com](http://www.Ir4rg.com) to learn more about the proposal have popped up throughout the area. The proposal before Liberty Township trustees seeks to create a Planned Overlay District.

Joshua Keeran | The Gazette

**POWELL** — Tuesday's meeting of the Liberty Township Board of Trustees turned into a six-hour marathon as local stakeholders weighed in on the controversial proposal to include a Planned Overlay District (POD) on approximately 190 acres between Hyatts and Clark-Shaw roads.

If approved, the overlay would pave the way for commercial and residential development on both sides of Sawmill Parkway, including multi-family housing, retail, and a possible OhioHealth medical facility. In January, the Liberty Township Zoning Commission voted against recommending approval of the overlay with a 4-1 vote.

Speaking during the meeting, attorney Steve Cuckler, who is representing Metro Development on the proposal, said the purpose of the POD is to "promote community, promote efficiency, and strategic, smart development, ultimately designed to attract commercial development and commercial users that ultimately diversify the tax base.

"We are over-reliant on single-family homes," Cuckler said of the township's current tax base. "We are over-reliant on the backs of average folks and their homes."

Cuckler went on to say that by approving the POD, Liberty Township will be able to attract commercial development to the community that, otherwise, wouldn't look at the area as a viable option.

"For every time that we bicker and fight, and work against commercial development, New Albany wins," Cuckler said. "Every time we do it — argue and be uncivil to each other — Dublin wins. It's time that Olentangy and Liberty Township wins."

Trustee Mike Gemperline, responding to the proposed developments highlighted by the development team, said he would be very surprised if OhioHealth decided to build a hospital at the corner of Hyatts Road and Sawmill Parkway. Gemperline pointed out OhioHealth has many different types of facilities that could ultimately be constructed there that wouldn't result in a hospital for the community.

Gemperline went on to challenge the idea of approving multi-family housing on the development, pointing out the trustees' work to prevent apartments in the township in the past. Speaking on the Schottenstein POD, located just north of Olentangy Liberty High School and approved by the township, Gemperline said, "The purpose of the POD, I hate to say it, was to landlock Powell. And the reason for landlocking Powell was to stop apartments. We're putting apartments here (in the proposal). So what's the difference if Powell does it or we do it?"

Responding to Gemperline, Cuckler said the commercial development that would come with the POD would require housing diversity in the area.

From the onset of the POD consideration by the township, which began in October 2020, much of the outspokenness from residents in the area centered around the Liberty Township Comprehensive Plan. The plan, which was approved in 2018, states "the township wishes to retain an area that has a more rural character" in Sub-area VII, also known as the "Northwest Estates."

Bill Henderly, a business owner in Liberty Township, said approval of the POD would be "inappropriate" and would "nullify the 2018 comprehensive plan," which was unanimously approved by a board of trustees that includes two current trustees in Gemperline and Shyra Eichorn.

"I'd like to see that we stick with (the comprehensive plan), and if it needs to be changed, let's modify it and then we can talk and review POD 18," Henderly said.

Township resident Patrick Donovan, who lives on Liberty Road north of Powell, said that, thankfully, the zoning commission listened to the residents' concerns and followed the comprehensive plan when voting against recommending the POD.

He added, "Being realistic, we understand that there will be development, and it will occur on this land ... The problem right now is that we, as a township, should not let a developer dictate how our township should move forward in the future. I believe there needs to be a reopening of the comprehensive plan before any development can be made in the area above Hyatts Road and along Sawmill Parkway."

John Hartman worked on the township's current comprehensive plan and said the future of the land between Hyatts and Clark-Shaw roads was considered at length during the construction of the plan. "The conclusion that it remain single-family residential and agriculture represented the broad consensus of the committee members and trustees," he said.

Hartman went on to say, "Development will happen, but it does not have to be what a particular developer wants or requests. It needs to conform to the zoning resolution and be compatible with the comprehensive plan. The 12 housing units per acre in Sub-area A's multi-family apartments are double what is allowed by the township zoning code..."

Of course, while much of the public hearing involved residents speaking against the POD, not all who participated were in opposition to the proposal. Kevin Popham called development to the area "inevitable" and said the question now becomes what is the best development for the area?

After echoing Cuckler's earlier comments that the comprehensive plan is not a law or mandate, Popham said, "We must rely on smart planning, which is a mix of single-family, multi-family, and commercial development to sustain this community into the future. I urge you to keep the tax impact low by approving this POD and bringing into this township the tax benefits that come with this commercial development."

Following the public hearing portion of the meeting, the trustees issued their thoughts on what was said earlier in the evening. Gemperline said his foremost issue is to do away with apartments in the proposal,

adding that if developments such as a medical facility would truly necessitate multi-family housing, the township should wait until such a facility is constructed before allowing apartments.

Gemperline added he would prefer to see single-family housing on the lot, but Trustee Bryan Newell questioned how many quality single-family homes could fit within the size of the lot.

Ultimately, the trustees voted for a continuation of the POD proposal to the March 15 meeting, which will be held at 7 p.m. In the meantime, residents and stakeholders can still submit suggestions and concerns to the township over the coming weeks by going to the township website at [www.libertytwp.org](http://www.libertytwp.org).