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First rezoning to Highland Station designation OK'd

by Brooke Meier

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The Highland Township Board of Trustees has approved the first Highland Station rezoning for a home in the historic district, following the Downtown Development Authority's (DDA) vision for the area.

Owners Rick and Christian Hamill asked the board to approve a request to change their property's zoning from a R-1C single-family residential to the Highland Station designation. Their property is located in the 200 block of North St. John Street.

"Both the Planning Commission and the Zoning Board of Appeals recommended we move forward with this," said Township Supervisor Triscia Pilchowski.

Before the couple can move forward with operating a business on the property, they have to obtain site plan approval.

"They want to take advantage of the Highland Station district designation, allowing them to conduct business in an area that is traditionally residential," Pilchowski said. "It goes to the heart of what the DDA has been trying to do, which is to allow for mixed-use and expand opportunities for the property owners over there. It's one of those tools to revitalize the area and Mr. and Mrs. Hamil recognized that opportunity and wanted to take advantage of it."

"There is an overall arching plan for the Planning Commission to review the entire township zoning ordinance and part of that would be a rezoning in the Highland Station area," said DDA Director Tim Colbeck. "This was an individual who had moved forward with a plan for a business prior to the zoning being approved and rather than saying you can't operate a business until the time when the plan is approved, they granted the couple a variance."

According to Colbeck, this won't be necessary when the new township zoning ordinance is implemented.

"We have submitted a plan for the Highland Station zoning, making it a special district, and there will be a number of changes to the zoning which will allow some different land uses as opposed to the rest of the township — one of them being residential-style commercial uses, meaning that you can run certain commercial businesses out of a residential area."

Pilchowski and Colbeck hope the new township zoning plan will be in place by this time next year.

Jennifer Frederick, a planner for the township, said the new zoning ordinance will give homeowners in the designated area the opportunity to stay residential or become like the Hamills and be able to run a business out of their home.

"It's a mixed-use so there are options," she said. "If homeowners were in the master plan for the district they could use this as a selling point and say the property has the potential to be zoned with the Highland Station designation."

The Highland Station district is located along Milford Road south of M-59.