

ARDMORE: Transit plan tabled

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ing owners and their supporters shouted down the resolution two hours before the commissioners tabled the idea.

The Ardmore merchants and building owners whose properties are potentially targeted for takeover and demolition claimed the resolution would declare the area "blighted."

Fox disputed that assumption.

"That's not the language used in the statute," said Fox, an attorney. "In terms of the act it talks about revitalization. It came across clearly at the meeting that most of the neighbors and businesses acknowledged something needs to be done to revitalize Ardmore. We need the tools in place to revitalize Ardmore. Passing the resolution is the first step in acquiring those tools."

Betty Foo, owner of Hu Nan restaurant, which is in the redevelopment block, said as much at the meeting when she took the microphone to say, "Please let us work with you. You cannot just send us a letter and shatter our lives."

Before the meeting, more than 100 marchers carrying signs gathered in front of Foo's business and other threatened buildings. They marched to Centennial Hall at the Haverford School, chanting the entire way. Most carried their signs into the meeting.

The planning commission made the protestors wait for two hours while it conducted other business before finally taking up the redevelopment plan.

Privately, some township commissioners admitted to being angry about the way the Ardmore Transit District project has been handled publicly.

"We don't know who sent out the eminent domain notices in the first place," one commissioner said. "Nobody is admitting to authorizing it."

"This was badly handled," another commissioner admitted.

Fox said he hoped the next meeting would focus on the merits of creating a redevelopment area. He believes Glenn Zeitz, the attorney representing the potentially threatened Ard-

more businesses, will put his objections to the seven criteria in writing for the planning commission before the next meeting regarding the project is held.

He noted there is no plan

for revitalization yet, on Hillier's proposed ideas.

All the planning commission is charged to consider, he noted, is whether the criteria for creating a redevelopment district have been met.

First Trump, now Ardmore? LM owners hire city attorney

By Jim McCaffrey

The Lower Merion Planning Commission was prepared for the marchers. It was not prepared for Philadelphia criminal trial attorney Glenn Zeitz.

Zeitz was hired by 11 Ardmore property owners to defend them against eminent domain in the Ardmore Transit District project. The place to start was with the declaration of the redevelopment area.

In the end, the commission voted to table the proposal to recommend the redevelopment to the Montgomery County Planning Commission. It is not expected to resume discussion about the transit project until July, at the earliest.

Zeitz has represented Vera Coking in her battle against Donald Trump and Trump Casinos in Atlantic City. He managed to save her home from demolition after the city tried to take it by eminent domain.

"It was the only New Jersey decision where, after condemnation had been declared, we were able to establish that there was no public purpose for the demolition," Zeitz said.

He also represented former Upper Merion School Principal Jay Smith, who was on death row for seven years, and the Ford Motor Co. in Cape May, N.J., after it was sued for the death of a woman after her husband claimed the airbags in the car were defective. Ford engineers found no defect. Zeitz developed a theory that the man killed his wife before they were in the accident. Ford was found not liable.

Zeitz was combative with the planning commissioners last Thursday, angrily challenging planning board rules. His pug-

nacity delighted the supportive crowd at Haverford School's Centennial Hall. The board refused to back off from its normal procedures.

Zeitz said he wasn't given enough time to demonstrate that the proposed redevelopment area did not meet any of the seven criteria required for redevelopment.

Zeitz said he wanted to call 16 witnesses, an expert planner and a traffic expert.

"I have the burden of establishing none of the seven criteria are met. I can't do that in 10 minutes," he complained. "I am not going to restrict that testimony based on what you are telling me."

Zeitz's first witness, Brownie's 23 East property owner Tony Ruffo, testified that he believed the township's redevelopment presentation was riddled with "lies."

Ruffo, who grew increasingly heated during his testimony, vowed to planners, "What you've done is documented. We have it all down. There's going to be a lawsuit. You are all getting sued individually."

"I like representing the Davids of the world, the little guys," Zeitz said after the meeting. "These owners are willing to be part of the change. They want to be part of it enough that they feel the township should include them in the process instead of excluding them."

"You should be able to accomplish your goals and include us without throwing us out of our businesses. My job is to defeat any attempt to have their properties designated as blighted."

Zeitz declined to comment on Ruffo's threat to sue. "It's very early in the game," he said.