

## New plans ruffle feathers at church hearing

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**There was some confusion at the continuation of the Cheltenham zoning hearing March 22 regarding a proposal to build a large church on Washington Lane.**

The hearing was a continuation from February of what is expected to be months of testimony regarding plans for the West Oak Lane Church of God, which is a 1,333-square-foot building containing a 1,333-seat sanctuary, a gymnasium, a family cinema, four bowling lanes and more.

Three attorneys representing the groups of interest were present, including Mark Jonas, representing the church, Robert Sugarman, representing the Elkins Michael Yanoff representing Lynnewood Gardens apartment complex.

Jonas said at the Feb. 2 hearing that he would be recalling civil engineer Brian Ciampitti of Ciampitti Associates, P.C., to give some "wrap-up" testimony, although he said. However, Ciampitti presented a new drawing of plans that depicted several changes to the plans previous witnesses had testified to.

Sugarman and Yanoff both objected to the new plans. Sugarman had planned to present a traffic engineer as expert testimony following the end of Jonas' closing testimony. Sugarman said he did not testify to the revised plans, since they were not presented to counsel until that night.

"This is a moving target," Sugarman said.

Yanoff agreed.

"Somebody has to analyze this and it's really unfair to spring this on us right now ... We're at a major disadvantage," he said.

The changes included an increase in the driveway width from 55 feet to 65 feet (which would require amending the variance), and a 20 percent reduction in parking spaces.

The board decided to allow Ciampitti to testify to the new plans but did not decide whether or not to approve the amendment to the variance previously requested.

He explained that the total space for the plans did not change, but the uses had, and several classrooms had been eliminated, which is why the parking spaces were reduced.

The parking was based on number of seats, not square footage, in several areas, he said.

Sugarman pointed out that the plans also called for the addition of about 200 seats in the gym for bleachers (there had previously been no seating), but the plans also showed a reduction in parking for the gym.

The off-site parking, originally slated for 563 spots, was reduced to 392 spaces.

The change in the driveway was made based on a suggestion from the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation, Ciampitti said. PennDOT suggested adding as well as adding a "channelization island" (also known as a "lamb chop") between the left lanes and the right turning lane, Ciampitti said.

Board Chairman Peter Labiak said Jonas would have to present a list of the changes included in the new plans within five days to both the board and opponents. Board members then have five days to respond to the list with any objections. The board will decide whether or not the changes will be allowed and announce the decision at the next hearing.

The hearing was continued until 7:30 p.m. April 19, at which time Sugarman's traffic expert will testify.