

www.CountyPressOnline.com / www.AllAroundPhilly.com

BPG Launches An Info Quest In Newtown

By **Kenn Stark**
Under the direction of Berwind Properties Group attorney Marc Kaplin, thou-

sands of public documents are being copied at the Newtown municipal building, but no one wants to say why.

The information-gathering project is being carried out by employees of the law firm of Kaplin-Stewart, which is based in Blue Bell. An associate lawyer, who asked not to be named, showed up at the township office last Tuesday with his own rented copy machine and reams of copy paper. He returned on Wednesday and came back on Thursday with a paralegal and a staffer in tow to provide assistance, working roughly four hours each day.

"We have a right under the Right To Know Act to look at public documents and that's all we're doing," Kaplin said in a phone interview. "When we're done looking at them, we'll evaluate them, and go from there."

Beyond that cryptic quote, Kaplin did not want to provide any further information for publication, noting that BPG and township officials have agreed to not negotiate in the press.

When Newtown Supervisor Chairman Joseph Catania was offered the opportunity to make comment on the copying project, he also declined.

The sparse information that was provided came from Township Manager James Sheldrake and the copying crew. The township is cooperating by giving the legal staffers access to all items outlined on a one-page list.

According to Sheldrake, the list has so far included minutes from supervisors' and Planning Commission meetings, as well as invoices and files dealing with eight different development projects, dating back to 1998. Each development has an estimated two boxes of papers, which the copiers are sorting to find selected items deemed copy-worthy. As of Thursday morning, nearly 2,000 copies had been made, the Kaplin team noted.

One staffer guess-timated that the copying project would be less than 20 percent completed as of end of day Thursday, and that "at least a couple more days" would be necessary to wrap up the tedious task.

The "fishing expedition" as one party (who wished to remain anonymous) called it, got off to a slow start on the first day. Although Kaplin had reportedly requested access to the documents through township solicitor Bruce Irvine, the township office was not notified in advance, creating a "scramble" when the copy-guy initially showed up. One administrative staffer has been kept busy retrieving boxes of files ever since.

"It's taken time from other projects that are in front of the township for review," Sheldrake noted. "They've had one of my staff tied up almost the whole time they've been here each day," he added.

Wednesday, December 12, 2007

BPG Office Building Powwow To Be Behind Closed Doors

A special closed-door meeting will be held at 7 tonight, Dec. 12, between Newtown Township supervisors and Berwind Properties Group representatives in an attempt to settle pending litigation outside the courtroom.

BPG is appealing the board's September conditional use ruling that restricted the size of a second office building on the Ellis Preserve front lawn, and prohibited construction of an adjacent third building. Supervisors had made the contested ruling on the heels of BPG claiming that the time frame for board action had elapsed, giving the applicant deemed approval for the second office structure.

The discussion of a potential settlement was requested by BPG, according to Supervisors Chairman Joseph Catania. Exactly how far beyond the conditional use appeal the private session might move was unknown prior to the meeting, Catania said, noting that a broader discussion of the town center and by-right plans for the entire 205-acre tract was a possibility.

- Kenn Stark