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Lancaster General Project Raises Important Land Use Issues

To the Editor:

The recent editorial and articles concerning Lancaster General Health's proposal to build a facility in West Earl Township raised important issues regarding land use both for this parcel and for the entire county.

Lancaster County was a pioneer in establishing urban growth areas. This important land use tool allows communities to define areas where they want development to occur as well as areas that should be reserved for agriculture. Municipalities across the county have shown their commitment to directing growth to appropriate areas by including urban growth areas in their comprehensive plans and implementing zoning to support urban growth areas.

One of the principle reasons for designating a particular area for growth is because it has the infrastructure necessary to support the growth. Building where there is existing infrastructure not only saves money, it also precludes running water and sewer lines across rural areas thereby opening them up for future development.

In the case of the Lancaster General Health project, West Earl Township has suggested that the site be serviced by new water and sewer lines that will stretch for miles across productive farmland rather than hook up to water and sewer that is directly across the street from the site. This will cost millions of dollars and will make this beautiful rural area a target for development.

In addition, a dangerous precedent will be set for all Lancaster County communities if this site, which is within an urban growth area, is served by water and sewer from miles away. Urban growth areas – one of only a few tools available to determine where growth should be – will be useless and Lancaster County's treasured farmland will be even more threatened.

Lancaster Farmland Trust has worked for more than 20 years to protect and preserve Lancaster County farmland. Even though we have been successful in permanently preserving more than 21,000 acres, we recognize that we alone cannot protect this valuable resource. Local municipalities, who hold the authority to regulate land use, must use every tool available to them and must make wise decisions if our farmland is to be protected.

Whether this site is ultimately developed by LGH or by someone else, it is imperative that West Earl Township find an alternative to running water and sewer lines through miles of open farmland. If they don't, all of Lancaster County's farmland will be in jeopardy.

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