

# Handling of dispute questioned

On June 13, the White Township supervisors approved a proposal to log the White's Woods Nature Center. Insisting that the valuable natural recreation area requires "forest" management rather than "parks" management, the supervisors decided that the best way to promote old tree growth is to cut down old trees.

And it wasn't only logic that fell by the wayside in this vote: Good government practice suffered as well.

Township officials hedged when directly asked, both in a public meeting and during a later telephone call, when the logging proposal would be brought to a vote. And when at least some concerned citizens called the White Township office on June 12-13, they were blocked from providing input, told simply that township staff had been instructed to refuse calls concerning White's Woods.

Even the criteria for definition as a White Township "constituent" became murky in the past few weeks. One supervisor went so far as to suggest that none of her constituents had contacted her concerning their opposition to logging plans for the White's Woods Nature Center. Inexplicably, none of the 1,000 people who signed a petition objecting to the timbering, or the 150 people who attended the June 11 meeting, or the hundreds of people who responded to a Gazette poll, or the dozens of people who tried to call were regarded as constituents by the White Township supervisors.

Interested citizens tried to find common ground. One business owner suggested insertion of a clause calling for monitoring of the timbering process as it occurred so it could be halted if the damage was too great. Many others requested a "second opinion" by a parks management consultant before moving to a final vote. But the supervisors' vision did not include collaboration with interested parties.

Our region can pursue a vision of economic development that goes hand in hand with the preservation of green spaces. But citizens need to work harder still to make that happen.