



TrackRacket seeks reasonable noise levels for Millville-area residents

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Letters to the Editor/The News of Cumber...

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Special to The News

Part I

On Jan. 15, 2009, over 50 people braved freezing temperatures to drive to the municipal building in Cedarville to share their stories and concerns over the noise they experienced from the newly built New Jersey Motorsports Park. This meeting was originally called for Lawrence Township residents as this is where I live. Interestingly, I began getting calls and e-mails from mostly Millville residents asking if they can attend. TrackRacket was born.

As complaints continued to come in during the first full racing season in 2009, it became clear there was a "noise zone" which stretches for a 3-mile radius around the track. There are over 4,500 homes in the zone that includes Millville, Lawrence, Commercial and Downe townships with an estimated 11,250 residents. The majority of the impacted residences are in Millville and makes up about a third of its population.

The overall topic of the meeting was that folks were aghast and angry that the amount of noise they experienced in their homes was much more than they were led to believe.

During the public meetings held by the city and the developers, these concerned homeowners listened to the experts. They attended commissioner meetings and planning board meetings or watched them on TV. Some went to become informed, some went to voice their opposition to something they believed would degrade their quality of life and hurt their property values. At the end of the first season of racing, they now felt misled by the City of Millville and the experts hired by the NJMP.

David Shropshire (Shropshire & Associates, NJMP's noise expert), under oath at the Nov. 25, 2005, Millville Planning Board meeting, stated his projection that noise from the park to the closest residential neighborhood (Porreca Drive) to be "55 decibels without attenuation." Without attenuation means no walls, berms or buffers. He went on to say that after they add the wall at the Lightbulb Turn (on the north turn of the Lightning Raceway — the closest part of the track to residential properties), residents would see "about a

10 decibels drop." Do the math, 55 minus 10 equals 45. The ambient noise level on Porreca Drive is between 35 and 45 (average 40), which includes the airport as a neighbor. So, if Porreca Drive residents were to experience noise levels of 55 decibels, along with the addition of the sound wall on the Lightbulb Turn, and since noise diminishes as it travels, folks who live farther away felt safe that the noise would not be a nuisance to them.

Here are more examples of what we were given:

* "Shropshire said remedies, such as a sound wall, as are used along most major highways, have not been included in the evaluation because no problems have been anticipated." (The Daily Journal, Nov. 30, 2004, "Park developer answers criticisms; Motorsports plan won't cause nose problems, attorney says")

* "Board member Milt Truxton honed in on the noise issue. Truxton quizzed Shropshire repeatedly about the best methods for reducing sound. Shropshire said the best method of handling noise issues is to create distance between the source and the nearest neighborhood. For instance, he said, placing a row of evergreen trees as a buffer would have a minimal effect. The engineer noted the closest residential neighborhood is about 3,500 feet away from the proposed site. That is a 'substantial distance' and the developer did not anticipate any problems, he said. 'This is not to say sound will not travel,' Shropshire said." (The Daily Journal Nov. 30, 2004, "Park developer answers criticisms; Motorsports plan won't cause nose problems, attorney says")

* "The park's sound expert, Dave Shropshire, said during previous public meetings that noise from the park could average 55 decibels. A normal conversation between people averages about 60 decibels." (The Daily Journal, July 27, 2009, "Group turns up volume on track")

And my personal favorite:

* "A proposed city ordinance, set for adoption next week, would set the maximum noise level at that of a telephone dial tone for most races but would exempt a small go-kart track." (The Daily Journal, Aug. 11, 2004, "Plan gains momentum in county")

Residents are understandably upset when they have levels of noise in the 65 decibels range with peaks at 79 that force them inside with the windows shut on beautiful summer days to escape the noise. (**See a video demonstrating the noise issue here.**) For those of us who live farther away from the motorsports park, we never dreamed we would hear the noise when presented with this testimony. After all, they are the experts, and we believed them.

I do not live in Millville. The noise zone extends into Lawrence, Commercial and Downe townships. I live just as close to the NJMP site as those in Millville. Noise knows no artificial boundaries. By siting the NJMP where it is, they have created a nuisance problem for adjacent townships/communities. Do they have a right to do

that? At the very least, it is inconsiderate and at the worst, irresponsible.

TrackRacket has advocated only for noise abatement that would bring the excessive noise under control. Noise levels we could live with. To allow a continual growth of an industry that adversely affects such a large portion of the anchored tax base without adequate protection is unconscionable. We have heard the economic arguments for what this industry could do for Millville and the county. Should these unproven "benefits" come at the expense of residents living in the noise zone? What is good for the local economy doesn't give the right to adversely affect the quality of life of its citizens. Does this "end" justify the means?

Noise from the NJMP will grow in volume and duration when they begin to complete the remaining approved phases. It would seem that existing housing should over-ride someone coming in and building something that creates an intolerable amount of noise pollution that factors into lower property values. But instead of being met with genuine offers to solve the problem, we have been verbally attacked, vilified and made out to be the bad guys. We have been told to move if we don't like the noise. There are families that have called this area of Millville their home for generations. Residents have enjoyed a certain quality of life in these quiet, stable neighborhoods that their families have toiled years of hard work to afford. Why should they be the ones to move?

If the city and the NJMP would have listened more attentively to residents' cries for help and reached out to the community as a part of the solution, we would not have had to resort to a lawsuit to protect our rights. To be continued.

Michelle Post is the founder of TrackRacket, a citizen's action group dedicated to reducing the excessive noise from the NJMP. Part two of her column will appear tomorrow.

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