Sports center zoning hearing continued to March

By Lee Kohn
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Space Center Partners LLC, which wants to develop an indoor sports center on the site of the former Coleman Suzuki car dealership at 1060 Spruce St., will have to wait until March to learn whether the township Zoning Board of Adjustment will approve its application.

The hearing began last week, but ran out of time to complete it.

The board took a few minutes to take care of some organizational matters, including the swearing in of Chuck Laver for a four-year term as a regular member, and the election of Peter Kremper as chairman and Sam Pangallo as vice chairman.

Although an indoor sports center is a permitted use in the Highway Commercial zone, a height variance is needed. The maximum permitted height is 30 feet, but Space Center Partners LLC has proposed the indoor sports center to be located inside an inflatable dome that will be 70 feet tall.

The dome will contain nearly 97,000 square feet. The entrance would be through a 6,550-square-foot single-story building at the rear of the site.

There were no bidders for the property at the real estate auction. The sale was negotiated after the auction.

Kevin Costello, the director of Centennial Athletic Club (the parent company of the would-be developer), called the company owns several indoor sports centers. They are split between tennis clubs and indoor athletic centers. Youth programs constitute the largest chunk of its business, he said.

"We would like to get into this town," Mr. Costello told the board.

The indoor recreation center would focus on youth programs, he said. There might be "some indoor sports" and maybe some events for outside groups. His company would conduct sports clinics. The facility might include a soccer field and maybe two or three basketball courts, but it is based on the community's needs, he said.

The facility would be open from 8 a.m. to midnight. Mr. Costello said the peak hours would be 4 p.m. to 8 p.m., for after-school programs. There would not be much activity from 8 p.m. to midnight, except for the adult sports leagues. On occasion, a portion of the athletic fields would be rented to a group for training purposes.

"That's for the meeting," Mr. Costello explained that it takes nearly five hours to install the dome, which he compared to "a giant balloon." It would take about eight or nine hours for it to fully deflate if there were a rip or a tear. The dome is not supported by any structural members. Fresh air is pumped into the dome, and there is a back-up emergency generator.

"We have a license to operate," he added.

But it is not just all sports, all the time. It's a center for the community. It will be a real improvement.

The next public hearing on the application is set for the Zoning Board of Adjustment's March 18 meeting. The meeting starts at 7 p.m. and will be held in the lower level conference room at the Municipal Building.