

South Union supervisors pave way for TIF

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South Union Township supervisors unanimously threw their support behind the tax increment financing (TIF) needed for the retail development.

During Wednesday's meeting, supervisors approved a blight analysis needed to pave the way for the project and a public hearing April 15, as required by state statute, to discuss the development more.

Cedarwood Development, Inc. of Ohio is seeking to build a commercial retail development within the existing retail development, Fayette Crossing. The proposed development site along Route 40 lies north of the current Walmart Super Center, the first property developed by the company in 2005. The new site is to include several major retailers, smaller shops and a restaurant.

The developer wants a TIF plan to defray costs associated with infrastructural improvements at the site that is also owned by the firm.

Randall Hake, vice president of commercial development for Cedarwood, said approving the TIF is essential to securing financing for the development.

"The TIF is essential to pull the trigger on this proposed project," he said.

The TIF plan is based on real estate tax income when the retail stores are constructed and operational.

South Union Township, Fayette County and Laurel Highlands School District are the taxing bodies affected by the TIF.

"There are tremendous benefits to the township and other taxing bodies," said Andrew French, executive director of the Fayette County Redevelopment Authority. "There is no risk for the township or taxing bodies."

Currently, the dormant, 27-acre property is assessed at \$672,250, with the county receiving about \$3,000 in tax revenue from Cedarwood. The township recoups about \$400 and the school district \$13,755 in tax revenue.

When completed, the value of the property is expected to rise to nearly \$15 million, with the county to potentially recoup \$67,500 annually; the township, \$8,970; and the school district, \$229,470.

The Fayette County Commission will vote on the TIF next week along with the school board.

Planners have estimated about 600 jobs — 200 for the construction and 400 for the operation of the businesses — would be created.

Supervisor Robert Schiffbauer said the school board has a big decision ahead — a simple choice in favor of jobs and tax revenue.

“It is reasonably anticipated that the Fayette County Commission will follow South Union Township’s lead in approving the TIF,” he said. “This will put the onus on the Laurel Highlands School Board members. Their decision will be quite simple. If the school board members embrace and support the idea of creating over 600 much-needed jobs and increasing funding for education, they will vote in favor of approving the TIF. If they choose to do otherwise and decline the TIF, they will have to live with the consequences of their actions by turning their backs on the community and their responsibility to act in the best interest of the school district.”

Supervisor Jason Scott said it is essential that Fayette County pursue economic development.

“We need to continue to bring development into the area to make it more attractive for people to live here,” he said.