

Redevelopment authority hears neighborhood stabilization report

Amy Revak Herald-Standard | Posted: Thursday, May 13, 2010 4:00 am

The Fayette County Redevelopment Authority heard Wednesday that the county's neighborhood stabilization program has meant demolition, rehabilitation and new construction in the county's three largest towns. Executive director Andrew French said the authority has had "quite a bit of success" with the program, which is geared toward rehabilitating downtowns. The authority received \$1.8 million in federal economic stimulus money last year for the program.

French said the work, which has centered on Masontown, Uniontown and Connellsville, has included the construction of three houses in Masontown; the purchase and rehabilitation of six houses in Uniontown; purchase and rehabilitation of two houses in Connellsville and demolition of 11 houses in Uniontown and two in Connellsville.

The authority took action to shift around some of the funding for the program. French explained that money that was earmarked for Masontown would be transferred to cover work in Uniontown.

However, French said Masontown would not lose out because other funding, including Community Development Block Grant money, would be used in the borough.

French said the authority is working with Threshold Housing Development of Uniontown to build and rehabilitate the houses. He said at a recent meeting of redevelopment officials, he learned that statewide only about 6 percent of the stabilization funding has been expended, while the authority has obligated more than 71 percent and spent nearly 56 percent.

"Our goal is to complete our projects," French said.

French added that in addition to the three new houses at the site of a former school in Masontown, plans are in the works to build three or four more.

Also, French said that he is hopeful that if additional funding were allocated, the authority would receive a portion because of its success to date.

The authority also voted to approve the re-subdivision of a lot that previously had been subdivided in the Fayette County Business Park in South Union Township. French said the change was essentially to make the parcel into four lots of two acres each.

The authority also voted to change which parcel is being purchased by Dr. Sunil Rayan, where Rayan plans to construct a medical arts center. Rayan, using the name of SAN, LP, is paying \$306,000 for the property.

French said Rayan is currently leasing space near Uniontown Hospital and plans to relocate his practice to the site, where he will employ an additional two physicians and 15 in medical staff. He said Rayan previously had challenges with the other lot he wanted to purchase and now wants a different lot.

French said plans include construction of a "multiple-level design" building that will include between 10,000 and 15,000 square feet.

"The aspects haven't changed. He is still interested in having a development in the business park," French said.

Also relating to the business park, the authority approved a \$599,758 contract with Fairchance Construction Co. of Fairchance for a Wayland Smith Drive Extension improvement and traffic signal project.

The project will include finishing a road to the proposed Fayette Area Coordinated Transportation transfer center and installing a traffic signal. Transit Drive will be constructed to access the transfer center. French said land sale proceeds are being used to fund the project.

The authority approved four projects for water lines, storm sewer and sidewalks.

They include: an \$87,202 contract with Redstone Excavating LLC of Brownsville to replace 2,000 feet of water lines to benefit 12 houses in the Cornish area of Springhill Township; a \$153,589 contact with Bella Enterprises Inc. of Cecil to install 2,500 feet of water lines in Markleysburg Borough that will result in 45 new customers; a \$26,986 contract with El Grande Industries Inc. of Monessen for sidewalk replacement on Connellsville Street in North Union Township and a \$51,633 contract with Morgan Excavating LP of Belle Vernon for a storm sewer installation project in the Brownstown area of Washington Township.

French reported that this year's Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) allocation is \$1.9 million, which is a 9 percent increase over last year. He said the CDBG funding is for the county and 11 entitlement townships. The authority

approved a cooperation agreement between the county and authority for the administration of the CDBG funds.

In personnel items relating to the weatherization department, the authority voted to promote Thomas Yeager III from installer to crew leader, raising his salary to \$22,800; and voted to promote two part-time installers to full time, Mike Czernatowicz and Mark Santillo, with salaries of \$20,800, plus benefits.

At the beginning of the meeting, Chairman Kenneth Finney took a few minutes to acknowledge the loss of longtime authority board member Ross DiMarco, who died unexpectedly last month.

Finney and DiMarco were previously honored for a total 58 years of service to the authority. Finney said he involvement to his business experience.

"He surely will be missed. He wanted to do all he could for the residents of Fayette County," Finney said. "He was a good man."

The commissioners are expected to name someone to fill the remainder of DiMarco's term at this month's meeting.