

Officials link area hotel development to economy upswing

By Eric Morris emorris@heraldstandard.com | Posted: Sunday, August 24, 2014 2:00 am

Ground broke Aug. 6 on a \$17.3 million hotel project to build an upscale, mid-priced Hilton Garden Inn in South Union Township.

The hotel is one of several hotel development projects underway in Fayette County, as developers seek to take advantage of a market demand for additional lodging.

“There’s a tremendous amount of demand in Uniontown. It’s increasing every year,” said Allan Wampler, president of Synergy Real Estate Corp., developer of the Hilton Garden Inn.

“There’s room in the market,” he said. “We believe that the market will support (the hotel).”

Most of that demand, Wampler said, is coming from the business sector, including people traveling for business-related reasons. Those traveling to Uniontown on business prefer to stay in Uniontown, he said.

The 119-room Hilton Garden Inn, located on Route 40 between Wayland Smith Drive and Synergy Drive and slated to open in summer 2015, will compete with surrounding markets, including hotels in Morgantown, Wampler said.

The hotel will include an indoor pool, conference room, restaurant, cocktail lounge and fitness spa, in addition to other amenities.

“You would have to travel pretty far to find that class of product,” said Wampler, adding that the hotel will bring something “new and fresh” to the Uniontown area.



Construction starts on South Union Twp. hotel

John F. Brothers | Herald-

StandardExcavation is underway for a Hilton Garden Inn to be constructed on Route 40 in South Union Township. The Hilton Garden Inn is one of four hotels currently being developed in Fayette County.

Synergy Hospitality Uniontown, the investment group for the project, consists of 35 business leaders, about 90 percent of which are local to the Uniontown area, Wampler said.

“The team that put this together were people who believed in the local economy,” he said. “They believed in the project and wanted to invest in the project and provide an upscale hotel experience in Uniontown.”

The purchase of the land on which the hotel will sit was finalized July 31 between the hotel developer and the Fayette County Redevelopment Authority for \$921,569.

Other hotel developments in the county include an 88-room Holiday Inn Express, set to be built on Mary Higginson Lane in South Uniontown Township, the 54-room Cobblestone along the Youghiogheny River in Connellsville and a Nemaquin Woodlands Resort proposed hotel near Lady Luck Casino in Wharton Township.

These developments come on the heels of the recent completion of an 80-room Comfort Suites on New Salem Road in South Union Township that opened Aug. 14.

In addition, the Holiday Inn on Route 40 in South Union Township is set to undergo significant renovations after being purchased in March by a Pittsburgh-based hospitality company.

Andrew French, executive director of the Fayette County Redevelopment Authority, said one reason for the increased interest from developers to bring additional hotels to the Uniontown area is that the new hotels are providing different products than the hotels that currently exist.

Another reason is the increased drilling of the Marcellus shale and hotel developers’ hopes to capitalize on out-of-state workers needing a place to stay, he said.

“The market data and analysis that I’ve seen is strong to demonstrate the need for additional rooms in Fayette County,” he said. “It’s always shown strong that the area could support the additional hotel rooms.”

French said he believes developers feel Marcellus shale drilling will continue in the area long enough to make the construction of the hotels worthwhile financially.

“The data that I’ve seen has shown that (Marcellus shale drilling) will be here for quite a while until the industry exhausts,” he added.

Fay-Penn Economic Development Council board chairman William Blaney said the upswing in development is a positive sign for economic development in the county and shows that the local economy may be trending upward.

“Not only are the new hotels going to provide jobs and potentially provide room space to people from outside of the area,” Blaney said, “the fact that people are willing to invest in these developments shows their confidence in the direction that Fayette County is going economically.

“If we can attract outside money to come in and build things, it shows that economically we’re on an upswing.”

Like French, Blaney said the Marcellus shale could be a factor in the vitality of the hotels.

“The gas industry is still active, but not quite as active as it was,” said Blaney. “But this is just a lull. It’s going to come back again. I think the demand for hotel rooms is going to increase again in the not so distance future — within the next one to two years.”

In Connellsville, the development of Cobblestone on North First Street at the site of the former Connellsville Bottling plant is less about shale drilling and more about its proximity to the Great Allegheny Passage, said Connellsville Redevelopment Authority executive director Michael Edwards.

With a forthcoming groundbreaking and a target opening of June 2015, the hotel will cater to people who use the Great Allegheny trail, which is located one block from the site of the future hotel.

“It’s something that Connellsville has been trying to get for 20 years or so,” said Edwards. “The completion of the Allegheny Passage was the impetus for this.”

Edwards said that the hotel’s developer, Hotel d2 Services, and its partner, Cobblestone Hotels, hope to capitalize on local tourism from the Great Allegheny Passage, nearby Seven Springs Mountain Resort, a new North American Hockey League team playing at The Ice Mine in Dunbar Township and functions such as parties and weddings.

“Based on the amount of trail users, we’d like it to be a base for trail users and other activities,” Edwards said, based on a market demand study. “Cobblestone Hotels builds a smaller hotel for towns of our size. Connellsville is a niche market.

“They did look and see what other things would attract visitors. The market demand study did look into the Marcellus industry, and I image that they would pick up some people from that, as well.”