

County gaming revenue to be distributed to eligible projects

By Patty Yauger pyauger@heraldstandard.com | Posted: Tuesday, September 22, 2015 2:00 am

Cash-strapped Fayette County municipalities, agencies and other organizations will look to the county's gaming proceeds to fund some of the projects that have needed financial help to get off the ground.

Nearly 30 people representing townships, boroughs, environmental organizations and the county turned out Monday to learn how their communities and entities might access a portion of the \$1.1 million in gaming revenues received by the county.

The amount was received from July 2013 through June 2015.

Earlier this year, the county commissioners appointed the redevelopment authority to establish a Local Share Account (LSA) for the Lady Luck Casino at Nemacolin Woodlands Resort revenue and implement criteria for its distribution.

Through the PA Race Horse Development and Gaming Act of 2004, the county receives 2 percent of the gross terminal revenues from the casino.

The funding must be earmarked for economic development and community improvement projects.

Wharton Township, where the casino is located, also receives a similar amount.

Each entity must prepare a detailed application, outlining the project, its cost and long range impact.

"Economic development is a priority," said Andrew French, redevelopment authority executive director.

Brownsville Mayor Lester Ward inquired if the funding could be used for the demolition of blighted buildings, while Beverly Braverman, executive director of the Mountain Watershed Association, questioned if the purchase of abandoned railroad beds would be considered.

The construction of sidewalks along busy highways in Smithfield Borough or the purchase of needed road maintenance equipment for Stewart Township were also among the eligibility inquiries.

French said that some projects, such as sidewalk construction and equipment purchases, could be funded through other state grant programs and would not likely garner approval. However, the removal of strategic properties that could lead to future development or using LSA funds to match other state, local or private money would be considered.

Eligible projects include those that promote local economic activity and create or retain jobs; improve or create civic, cultural or recreational activities or facilities or those that improve the quality of life in the affected communities.

French said that Smithfield Borough's plan to construct a walking track within an established park could be considered for LSA funding as it meets the community improvement criteria.

Project requests that propose to utilize LSA funding as a match for other public or private funding will be given extra consideration during the selection process, said French. "These have to be projects that are ready to go," he said.

The applications will be reviewed by a steering committee comprised of the three county commissioners, representatives of the county planning, zoning and community development office, county redevelopment authorities, Fay Penn Economic Development Council, industrial development authority and the Private Industry Council of Westmoreland/Fayette.

Ward asked that a representative of the township and borough associations also be placed on the panel.

The steering committee will recommend the top applicants to the commissioners for final approval.

French said that he anticipates the bulk of the \$1.1 million to be distributed in the first round if the projects meet the criteria.

The distribution of funds will take place annually beginning in 2016.

Applications must be submitted to the redevelopment authority office by 4 p.m. Sept. 29. Applications can be found on the authority website at www.racfpa.org.

For additional information about eligible projects or to obtain a copy of the application, email French at afrench@racfpa.org or call 724-437-1547, ext. 210.