

## Brownsville redevelopment taking time and money

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BROWNSVILLE — The Fayette County Redevelopment Authority has possession of downtown Brownsville properties and will be seeking bids for demolition, but that doesn't mean any buildings will be coming down soon.

Redevelopment authority and borough officials took a walking tour of the downtown area this past week to determine immediate steps to be taken to safeguard the public.

“We noted some doors and windows that need to be boarded up, loose window glass and bricks that need to be taken out, things that need to be done to make it safe,” said Councilman James Lawver.

Redevelopment authority executive director Andrew French said the entire downtown area is a nationally-designated historic district, which adds another step to any demolition or development plans carried out with public funds.

“I know folks are frustrated there is this process we have to go through, but being a redevelopment authority and being in an historic district, I knew we'd have to do a comprehensive study,” French said.

The National Road Heritage Corridor has obtained a \$25,000 grant through the Pennsylvania Historic and Museum Commission for a study of the impact of demolition or rehabilitation in downtown Brownsville. Although it could take as long as six months for completion of the study, French said it will actually streamline the process.

“By doing the study, we won't have to do an impact study on each individual building,” French said.

Permission has already been granted by the PHMC for the old hardware/Healthmart building next to the Market Street parking lot to be torn down.

French said his office is working with McMillen Engineering to come up with the bid specifications for the demolition.

“It will be up to the borough if they want to move forward or wait for completion of the study,” French said.

Lawver said he would recommend the borough wait until the study is done and permission has been granted for more demolitions in order to get a better price.

“We only have \$500,000 earmarked for demolition. There’s asbestos and lead in those buildings, so the environmental costs alone are going to be expensive,” Lawver said. “We may not have enough money.”

French said there is \$1.2 million left of the \$2 million in state grant money for blight control in downtown Brownsville. Twenty-two of the 30 properties taken by eminent domain were owned by Ernest and Marilyn Liggett of Monroeville or one of their companies. Liggett is currently appealing a ruling by Fayette County Common Pleas Court that the redevelopment authority does not need to compensate him an additional 100 properties he owns in the area.

French said some funds must be set aside for the legal fees in that case and the possibility of a reversal of the local decision.