

Brownsville Borough councilmen, mayor address authority about downtown buildings

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Two Brownsville councilmen and Mayor Lester Ward approached the Fayette County Redevelopment Authority Wednesday, urging the board to set additional meetings to address the future of several buildings in downtown Brownsville.

Council President Jack Lawver asked the authority to set one meeting for stakeholders and another for the general public.

“These next two meetings are critical to what direction we are going to take,” he said. “We need to set the course for what is finally going to happen in our downtown area. We’re coming down to a critical point.”

The meetings will address a redevelopment authority project that has been going on for several years. In 2008, the authority acquired 28 properties via eminent domain to either preserve or demolish, said Andrew French, authority executive director.

“It’s been 20 years, 30 years that these buildings have been allowed to go to deterioration,” Ward said. “If we’re going to move ahead as a community and protect our citizens, we have to do a selective demolition. In order for Brownsville to move forward, we have got to have some of these buildings come down.”

Ward urged authority board members to visit Brownsville to examine the current state of the properties.

According to French, because the buildings are located in the historic district, the next step is to set up a meeting with consulting parties.

The National Road Heritage Corridor, Cathy McCollom of McCollom Development Strategies of Confluence and Preservation Pennsylvania have all requested to be granted consulting party status.

Ultimately, French said, the decisions about the future of the buildings will come back to the redevelopment authority.

“Andrew (French) has been good to us, and I support the plan that he has,” said Councilman Jim Lawver. “Let’s put Brownsville on the fast track to move forward.”

Also Wednesday, the board approved the cooperation agreement between the authority and the county regarding the administration of the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program for fiscal year 2013.

As the administrator of the funding, the authority is responsible for the planning, preparation and implementation of the projects. The application, which has been submitted to the state, was prepared in-house.

CDBG money has been used in the past for a variety of projects, including road reconstruction, storm sewer maintenance and removal of blight.

French said the county will receive a little over \$1 million in CDBG money for fiscal year 2013.

In an unrelated matter, the board approved a grant agreement between the authority and Fayette County Community Action, providing \$27,000 through the county's Act 137 Affordable Housing Fund to support the Fayette Apartments Development in North Union Township.

French said the money will be used to improve the waterline to help service the apartments.

French also reported Wednesday that the authority was successful in receiving \$432,810 from the Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency to aid in the construction of nine new homes in Redstone Township. The authority will then use that money to leverage another \$990,000 in other funds to make the project happen, French said.

In other business, the authority:

n Approved the single audit report for the year ending December 2012.