

[Return to Story](#)[Print This Page](#)[Larger text](#)[Smaller text](#)

State grants offer boost to downtown Brownsville plan

By [Joe Napsha](#)

Saturday, Nov. 1, 2014, 5:52 p.m.



Brownsville's efforts to revitalize the borough's downtown business district have received another boost in the form of a \$175,000 state grant to develop the vacant lots along Market Street into a town square that will feature a handicapped-accessible concert stage, landscaping, a walking path, sidewalks and an improved parking lot. "We're hoping this will be the economic impetus for the improvement of Brownsville," Mayor Lester Ward said in response to the grant.

The state Department of Community and Economic Development's Greenway Trails & Recreation Program has provided the Redevelopment Authority of Fayette County with the grant to make a community and regional park at Snowden Square, located along Market Street in the heart of Brownsville's historic district. The site of the proposed park is within walking distance of the town's Riverside Wharf Park, the landscaped and terraced wharf that has benches, fishing platforms and a public boat launch into the Monongahela River.

"This is going to bring the project to fruition," said James Lawver, president of Brownsville Borough Council. Borough officials had hoped the work could begin this fall, but the mayor said they will push to have the project started next spring.

"It's been in the talking stages too long," Ward said.

The redevelopment authority still needs to have engineering work done, as well as other planning work on the project before it can be advertised for bids, possibly early next year, said Andrew French, executive director of the county's redevelopment authority.

When the project is complete, it will make Snowden Square "the epicenter of the downtown district," French said.

Lawver believes it will give Brownsville a much-needed "shot in the arm."

To clear the site for the park, the redevelopment authority demolished the former Health Mart store building, as well as a closed gas station, a few years ago, Ward said.

As part of the efforts to improve the historic downtown district, borough employees and the River Town Outreach Corps cleaned up the borough's Central Park along Dunlap Creek, across Market Street from Snowden Square.

To prepare Snowden Square for the redevelopment initiative, the redevelopment authority razed a closed gas station and the former Health Mart store buildings, a few years ago, French said.

The state grant carries with it a requirement that the recipients provide a 15 percent match, but the borough has financial commitments of about \$125,000, which more than covers the 15 percent local match of \$26,250, French said.

Money was raised locally and from foundations in the region, French said. The Heinz Endowments of Pittsburgh provided a \$50,000 planning grant, through the Community Foundation of Fayette County. The UPMC Health Plan in Pittsburgh provided \$30,000 and has committed another \$50,000, French said.

James Lawver credited Brownsville Area High School's Students in Action team for developing "Operation Falcon Revitalization," a plan that was the impetus for the Snowden Square revitalization efforts. They had the idea of Snowden Square featuring a concert stage facing the Monongahela River.

The Students in Action team collaborated with other students and community organizations on a plan to rebuild Snowden Square. The students joined with Brownsville Borough Council, the county's

redevelopment authority, borough engineer Terry McMillen and the non-profit Brownsville Area Revitalization Corp. in devising a redevelopment plan.

The students are “really excited” about the news that the state has awarded money to the project, said Kelli Dellarose, a Brownsville Area High School chemistry teacher and sponsor of the Students in Action team.

The students started four years ago with the desire to “change the morale of the town” by making Snowden Square a park with a concert stage, Dellarose said.

Government officials had debated what to do with Snowden Square and the concert stage idea “just took off,” she said.

Work on Snowden Square is occurring as the redevelopment authority, which acquired 29 properties in downtown Brownsville, continues its planning and discussions with different interested parties on what to do with those properties. French said he believes the end result will be a combination of demolition and stabilization of the properties formerly owned by Churchill businessman Ernest Liggett, who once owned 95 percent of Brownsville's riverfront.

Joe Napsha is a staff writer for Trib Total Media. He can be reached at 724-836-5252 or jnapsha@tribweb.com.

Copyright © 2014 — Trib Total Media
