

# Ohio firm request financing help for South Union complex

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The Fayette County Redevelopment Authority took the first step Wednesday to aid an Ohio development company to finance a new commercial construction in South Union Township.

In unanimous action, the board agreed to prepare a Tax Increment Financing (TIF) plan for Cedarwood Development to provide financing for the development of a retail mall on property now owned by the authority.

Known as Fayette Crossing, the now undeveloped property lies north of the current Walmart Super Center, along Walmart Drive.

Attorney Jeffrey A. Mills of ReedSmith in Pittsburgh, said the financing plan would help the developer with costs tied to parking facilities, utilities, lighting and other improvements to the property while increasing revenues for the local taxing bodies, including South Union Township, Laurel Highlands School District and the county.

Mills said the current tax revenue from the property equals about \$14,000, while post development income would be about \$305,000. If approved, the TIF would allow the developer to utilize \$233,000 of the difference to repay its bonds with the remaining amount — \$72,000 — divided among the taxing districts.

The development would also provide jobs and an increase in other taxes that are collected by the municipality, school district and county, added Mills.

“The approval of the TIF is the first step,” he said.

Randall J. Hake, Cedarwood vice-president of commercial development, said that a national sporting goods store, women’s clothing store, a craft and hobby shop along with a hotel and restaurant are to be included within the complex.

Should the financing agreement be approved by all parties, construction could begin early next year.

As part of the agreement, the authority will work with the township, school district and county to prepare the financing plan that also must be inked by the authority.

The motion was approved by authority board Chairman Paul Bortz and directors Dale Malinzak and Jonathan Garlow. Directors Odelia John and Philip Michael were absent from the meeting.

In other action, the board agreed to transfer two parcels owned by the authority to the Brownsville Free Public Library for \$1.

According to Andrew French, authority executive director, the library board has developed a plan for the property that will include parking and landscaping.

“A study has been completed that will provide technical specifications for the stabilization of a bank that leads to Dunlap Creek and will complete the development,” he said.

The agreement requires all the work to be completed within three years.

In a related matter, the board opted to table action that would transfer a 29 Market St. property to the Brownsville Area Revitalization Corporation (BARC) and a sum of \$80,000 to help renovate the structure on the property.

In September, BARC representatives approached the authority and requested that the property be turned over to the organization instead of being demolished as planned.

BARC owns the adjoining properties and is in the planning stages to renovate a multi-story building at 27 Market St.

“We’ve worked hard to revitalize our town,” said Norma Ryan, BARC charter member, during the earlier meeting.

The renovation was put on hold when it was found that the roof on the 29 Market St. building was beginning to collapse, added Ryan.

French said that the Brownsville Borough Council had supported the demolition of the structure.

Jack Lawver, borough council president, and Mayor Lester Ward, attended the meeting, Wednesday, and asked the authority to proceed with the demolition to allow the borough to “move forward” and eliminate the blighted property.

“Let us get started with a surgical demolition of the property,” said Ward, adding that most residents are favorable of the removal of the building. “It will give us the space and allow someone to come in and do something.”

Lawver said that the borough has long supported organizations that have had plans and the funding to complete projects, but it is not clear whether BARC has a plan or the

financial backing to undertake the likely costly project.

“The health and safety of the community is in question,” said Lawver.

French, meanwhile, said that he will schedule meetings with those that are in favor of the restoration of the property and bring the information back to the board for consideration.