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Tuesday, January 09, 2007

Commissioners to vote on verification resolution for PennDOT

By Paul Sunyak, Herald-Standard
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Solidifying the pledge that a Matthew Drive extension will be built through the Fayette County Business Park located off Route 40, the commissioners will vote today on a verification resolution that includes a stipulation on backup funding.

Tammy Shell, director of the county Office of Planning, Zoning and Community Development, broached the PennDOT request at Tuesday's agenda meeting. Shell told the commissioners that PennDOT, which had earlier agreed in principle to consider granting highway occupancy permits in the area contingent on the through road being built, wanted more formal assurances.

PennDOT wants the commissioners to formally commit to building the road by 2012 and initially asked for a "letter of credit" that PennDOT can invoke to build the road should the county fail to follow through, said Shell.

Although PennDOT is willing to accept a resolution in lieu of a letter of credit, Shell said PennDOT also wants the county to pledge a form of financing in the event of default on its pledge. She said PennDOT suggested that the county commit its liquid fuels money as collateral, while Commissioner Ronald M. Nehls recently suggested using money the county has lined up in the Washington County bond pool.

"They need some type of collateral, so in case the county should renege on its resolution and not build it by that year, PennDOT will have something to come back on so they can construct the road," said Shell.

Reiterating a point that Commissioner Sean M. Cavanagh

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made Tuesday, Shell said Wednesday that PennDOT made no such request when county and state officials held a high-level meeting with District Engineer Michael Dufalla and his staff Feb. 8.

"We assumed everything was fine (Feb. 8). Even at the meetings after that, nobody ever told us that a letter of credit was needed," said Shell.

Nehls noted that PennDOT was now laying down a new condition for development in the area, and said the way it was handled underscored the lack of communication. "Give us a call," said Nehls regarding how matters of utmost importance should be handled.

Shell said the Feb. 28 letter was sent from PennDOT to McMillen Engineering Co., the engineer for the Fayette County Redevelopment Authority, but she received it only last week from authority Executive Director Raymond C. Polaski. She said she wasn't sure when McMillen got the letter.

PennDOT wants an assurance that the through road, which will connect New Salem Road to Duck Hollow Road, is built by at least 2012, said Shell.

Cavanagh said the county had already pledged to construct the road by 2008 and believes that goal will be accomplished. "If we can't build this by 2012, we're not worth our salt," said Cavanagh.

Polaski said Wednesday that the initial design for the through road was three lanes, but added, "It probably will be four lanes when all is said and done, two in each direction, because we have to match it up with the existing Matthew Drive."

Polaski said the estimated cost of building the through road at three lanes was \$1.7 million, but Shell said that in her discussions with McMillen, the engineer advised her to set \$2 million as a realistic construction cost.

Dufalla did not return a call seeking comment.

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