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Lawmaker gives support to Fayette County Business Park

By Amy Karpinsky, Herald-Standard
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In what he joked was "deja vu all over again," U.S. Rep. Frank Mascara on Friday visited a construction site that will be part of the Fayette County Business Park to show his support for the project.

The Charleroi Democrat said he was hesitant to stop at the site because he is involved in a re-election campaign and the tactic could be seen as a campaign ploy. However, he said he wanted to show Fayette County officials that he is committed to the project and will do everything he can to get funding for it.

Mascara was a Washington County commissioner when work on the 588.6-acre Southpointe development in Washington County began. He said the last piece of that development, which got its first tenant in 1992, was sold recently, and the project has meant 5,000 jobs.

Mascara said he spoke with Fayette County Commissioner Chairman Vincent A. Vicites when Vicites first took office and suggested that Southpointe could be used as a model for future economic development for Fayette County.

And just as the Washington County Airport runway was extended, Fayette County is working to extend its airport runway, and that will help with development, Mascara noted. Vicites, a staunch Mascara supporter, said Southpointe is a phenomenal success story, and he joked that he wanted to name the Fayette County Business Park "High Point" because it has the potential to be like Southpointe.

Several officials braved the cold to tour the site, and the group

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moved inside what will be a new Super 8 motel in an attempt to get out of the cold.

During Friday's visit, Mascara said he has been in Fayette County many times and he wasn't visiting to promote himself but the project. He said he has a soft spot in his heart for Fayette County, since he was born and raised in Belle Vernon.

The park is being developed on 277 acres along Route 40 off New Salem Road. The property was the former site of the county home and was recently turned over to the Fayette County Redevelopment Authority.

Super 8 Motel and Terry McMillen Engineering already have purchased lots, and options have been given to Uniontown Hospital and Career Link.

Vicites said the park eventually will be a "mixed use" site like Southpointe, where people can live, work and play. He said the county is not looking for a handout and has floated a bond dedicating \$2 million each for the airport and the business park.

Vicites stressed that before the project can be completed, the county must focus on federal funding. The commissioners recently sent letters to both Mascara and U.S. Rep. John Murtha (D-Johnstown) requesting \$12 million in federal funds for three road projects related to the site: upgrading Matthew Drive to four lanes, upgrading New Salem Route to four lanes and relocating New Salem Road from Matthew Drive through the business park to Route 40.

Vicites said an exit ramp will be near the park when the Mon/Fayette Expressway is completed.

Mascara said highways and infrastructure go hand in hand with economic development and that the Uniontown-to-Brownsville expressway link "has to be done now." Plans for that section, which has been discussed since the early 1970s, have been stopped twice, but they won't be again, he added.

"We're going to build this piece," he said.

Vicites pointed out that Fayette County is the only county in Southwestern Pennsylvania that does not have a four-lane, limited-access road going through it.

Mascara, a member of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, said he believes money follows the path of least resistance, and since some residents in Allegheny County have opposed the expressway, the Uniontown-to-Brownsville section should be built now.

He said \$20 million is committed to the local section, and earmarking money is the way to ensure it goes where it is needed.

Members of the Fayette County Redevelopment Authority, including executive director Raymond C. Polaski and board members Kenneth M. Finney and Ross DiMarco, also visited the site.

Polaski said the project will be done in three phases. He said a \$500,000 water and sewage project is well under way, and future projects include extending Matthew Drive and a project beyond Fan Hollow Road.

"We're going in the right direction," he said.

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