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Status of new mental health building discussed at meeting

By Amy Karpinsky, Herald-Standard
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A status report for the future Mental Health/Mental Retardation building at the Fayette County Business Park was given during Tuesday's agenda meeting of the Fayette County commissioners.

Lisa Ferris Kusniar, county MH/MR director reported that the issues with the land are being finalized. She said her office is working with the office of architect Michael S. Molnar and Associates regarding the final internal structure for the building and it has not been put out to bid yet.

Kusniar said last year's funding has been spent for the project and she is in the process of getting approval for health choices investment money. Raymond C. Polaski, executive director of the county redevelopment authority, said a ground breaking could possibly be held when the weather breaks. However, Kusniar said it will probably be a full year before the building is constructed.

Polaski said the weather hasn't cooperated for any development in the South Union Township Business Park since September. With construction of the MH/MR building, the department will no longer have to utilize three different sites for its offices. The department is currently spread out among three floors.

Stormwater management issues and a countywide housing market analysis were among other topics of discussion.

Tammy Shell, director of the office of Planning, Zoning and Economic Development, approached the commissioners

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about working with Washington and Westmoreland counties on a stormwater management issue in the Mon-Valley area of the county. Shell said the issue affects the Luzerne and Brownsville areas. She said officials in Donora and Monessen, which are spearheading the effort, are seeking to hold a public meeting with county commissioners for all three counties.

However, Shell said there may be other areas of the county in which stormwater management needs to be addressed. Commissioner chairman Vincent A. Vicites said he would approve a motion for discussions with the other two counties. The commissioners voted to place on Thursday's agenda a motion to discuss the issue with the other counties.

Polaski and Shell spoke about seeking consultation services for development of a countywide housing market analysis. Polaski said the county has to start somewhere to have statistics to show potential businesses moving into the county. He said a study needs to be done to determine if housing for the elderly or housing for top executives at businesses is needed.

Commissioner Sean M. Cavanagh pointed out that there is residential land designated for the Fayette County Business Park on Route 40 in South Union Township. Vicites said the county is defeating the purpose of attracting businesses if the top executives aren't living in the county.

Commissioner Ronald M. Nehls said a study is needed for the county. Shell said grant money is available for the analysis. The commissioners voted to place on Thursday's agenda a motion to advertise for the consulting services for the analysis.

Cavanagh also suggested looking into a tax abatement program for homebuilders like the one instituted in Greene County in which homebuilders don't pay property taxes for three years and businesses are giving a break for five years.

Shell reported that the public meetings for updating the county's zoning ordinance will be held in February. She also said an assistant solicitor is needed for the county zoning hearing board. Vicites said Cheryl Heid could serve the position, while Cavanagh suggested that either Mark Morrison or Ricardo Cicconi, who are ZHB members and attorneys, could fill the slot. Shell said she would look into who is interested.

The commissioners voted to place on Thursday's agenda a motion to approve LERTA for Uniontown's Downtown Business District, effective Jan. 1 and expiring Dec. 31, 2007. Cavanagh said it is one of the tools the commissioners can use to stimulate construction, rehabilitation and remodeling. The resolution has been passed by the city council and must also be approved by the school district.

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