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Company still wants to buy land in business park

By Amy Karpinsky, Herald-Standard
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After expressing interest in acquiring property in the Fayette County Business Park last year, officials from Synergy Real Estate Corp. made it clear Tuesday that they are still interested in purchasing the land.

Last year the Fayette County Redevelopment Authority took action to consider the sale of 3.5 acres at the business park, located along Route 40 in South Union Township, to Synergy or its assignees at a price of \$329,000 but the sale was never finalized.

Plans were for Synergy to build a "flex building" containing approximately 40,000 square feet of space that would potentially include insurance companies, distributions centers, light manufacturing business, retail sites and food service businesses.

At the time, Synergy also agreed to share up to \$100,000 in the cost for a traffic signal on Route 40.

Since that time, several developments have occurred at the park, such as the sale of a 37-acre parcel to Armstrong Development and a 25-acre parcel for Cedarwood Development Inc., both for large scale commercial projects, including a Wal-Mart Super Center and other major retailers.

Allan Wampler, president of Synergy, told the authority that he wants to reinforce his company's interest in the site, but added that an appraisal of the property should be done before a sale can be finalized. He said he would like to formulate a plan within the next 30 to 60 days. Wampler also mentioned that if the authority will do the grading of the site, that could be part of the negotiations regarding sale price.

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Raymond C. Polaski, former executive director of the authority who is now special projects coordinator for the authority, said the only thing that can't be done at the site within the next couple months is moving dirt. He said attorneys for both sides can "get together and pound out an agreement" and an appraisal can be done.

Polaski said the site has taken on a new life because of what's happening around it. He said 18 months ago there was no Cedarwood and no Wal-Mart. "The whole thing is a living project," he said.

Solicitor Herb Margolis said to date, he received two contracts from Synergy, prepared one and sent it and then received another agreement. He said if he could sit down with Synergy's attorney, "in two hours time we can have a contract."

Wampler said a lot of the reason it has taken so long is issues regarding how much property Cedarwood will take and right of way issues. "As long as we are at the grindstone, we can still work through the issues," Wampler said.

"We just want to keep our place at the table, that's why we're here tonight," Wampler said. He attended the meeting with Synergy vice president Mark H. Smith.

Authority chairman Kenneth M. Finney Jr., who initially said the property was no longer for sale, said at the conclusion of the discussion that the authority would contact Synergy as soon as they are ready to move regarding the property.

During the director's report, Andrew French reported that the authority continues to move to close on deals at the business park with Cedarwood and Grandview. He said construction is ongoing for three medical facilities at the site.

In other action, the authority approved submission of the 2005-06 weatherization grant application in the amount of \$586,958. In the 30 years the authority has done the program, 8,000 homes have been improved, French said.

Weatherization director Al Jeffries said plans are to conduct weatherization activities on 127 homes and install 118 furnaces with the crisis program. He said the waiting list has about 850 names. The program, which helps low-income individuals, is on a first-come, first-served basis.

The authority terminated a contract with W.J. Woodhouse Jr. and Sons Inc. of Eighty Four for demolition and site clearance at 79 and 81 Frick St. in Brownsville, because the company did not perform the demolition. French said the contract will now be awarded to 3D Development to perform the work.

Donald Baugh was appointed to the position of senior inspector to help with the code enforcement in Brownsville. French said Baugh's salary will increase to \$39,000, since he will be supervising staff.

The authority voted to enter into a contract with Hansen Design of Pittsburgh to conduct a master plan for the Market Street and North Side business districts of Brownsville.

French said planned aesthetic improvements for the north side will include street light improvements, bench installation and relocation of utilities.

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The authority also approved cooperation agreements regarding applications to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development Economic Development Initiative program to support infrastructure development at the business park in the amount of \$288,672 and to support the downtown Uniontown revitalization project in the amount of \$481,281. French said U.S. Rep. John Murtha worked on both allocations.

During the annual meeting, the board unanimously made the following selections: Finney, chairman; Ross F. DiMarco, vice chairman/assistant secretary; James S. Woleslagle, treasurer; Rob Sleighter, assistant treasurer and Paul Bortz Jr., secretary.

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