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Authority continues to work toward completion of business park

By Amy Zalar, Herald-Standard
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As dirt continues to fly at the Fayette County Business Park, the Fayette County Redevelopment Authority is working toward completion of infrastructure projects at the site.

The authority approved utility agreements Tuesday regarding right-of-ways and cost sharing at the Route 40 business park, where a new Wal-Mart Super Center is under construction.

The authority approved a cost sharing agreement in which Wal-Mart developer Cedarwood Development Inc. and the authority will share the costs of utility relocations and improvements. As per the agreement, Cedarwood will pay nearly \$1.4 million, or approximately 50 percent of the \$2.8 million cost of utility improvements and relocations. The authority's share is estimated at \$1.3 million.

Executive director Andrew French said the cost sharing agreement is meant to reduce costs for the authority. French said the authority is working cooperatively with Cedarwood, which is currently moving dirt at the site.

The authority approved submission of an application to the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania Infrastructure and Facilities Improvement Program to assist Cedarwood. French said if the application is approved, Delta Development would receive \$8.1 million over 10 years to help pay for costs associated with construction of the new Wal-Mart, which will be twice the size of the current store it will replace. It is slated to open late next year.

French said the statewide IFIP program began last year at \$5 million, and may be increased to \$15 million this year. He said the authority would act as the "sponsor" for the money, possibly by issuing bonds. While the authority has the ability to issue bonds, it has never done so. French said the money is essentially tax increment financing using state sales taxes. He said the annual amount the developer is requesting is approximately 18.25 percent of the total sales tax from the development.

The estimated annual state sales tax benefit for the new store is \$4.5 million, French said.

During the executive director's report, French urged everyone to visit the business park. He said work is continuing at the site, including blasting and dirt moving.

Authority Chairman Ken Finney, who works at Career Link at the business park, said progress at the site is "unbelievable."

In a related matter, French reported that the bids for Matthew Drive Extension through the business park were opened last month and came in \$2 million higher than anticipated. The apparent low bidder is Penn Development, which bid \$6,995,168.80. French said plans are to potentially pinpoint other sources of funding.

The authority has a cost sharing agreement with PennDOT in which the authority pays 56 percent and PennDOT pays 44 percent, which would mean the authority has to come up with \$1 million more to fund the road.

The authority approved a right-of-way agreement with Allegheny Power. In explaining the agreement, French said Allegheny Power is relocating a main aboveground transmission line.

The authority also approved an agreement with the state Department of Health for a \$303,367 grant to implement a lead hazard control program in Fayette County. French said the authority is one of only a half dozen agencies in the state asked to participate. He said plans are to use the money over three years to rehabilitate homes in which children under the age of 6 have high lead levels. French said the authority would target 10 homes per year.

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