

Local business awarded road contract

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Penn Development Services of Uniontown has been awarded a road construction contract totaling nearly \$7 million to build Matthew Drive Extension through the Fayette County Business Park in South Union Township.

Andrew French, executive director of the Fayette County Redevelopment Authority, said Thursday that Penn Development was the successful bidder for the new four-lane road, with a bid of \$6,995,168.80. The new one-mile road will begin off of New Salem Road and continue through the business park to Route 40.

French said Penn Development is already on-site working for Cedarwood Development for the Wal-Mart Super Center under construction in the park and won't lose time transferring equipment to begin work. "It really has worked out well that they were the low bidder," French said.

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Although the bids were opened in October, Penn Development was not awarded the contract until last month because the bids came in significantly higher than anticipated. French previously said Penn Development's low bid was about \$2 million more than the amount of money budgeted for the project.

After the bids were opened, a meeting was held with state Department of Transportation officials, the Fayette County commissioners and state Sen. Richard Kasunic, D-Dunbar, to discuss ways to come up with the difference in funding, French said.

The authority has a cost sharing agreement with PennDOT in which the authority pays 56 percent and PennDOT pays 44 percent. French said under that agreement, the authority would have been responsible for an additional \$1.2 million to fund its portion of the road.

However, after the meeting, French said PennDOT agreed to treat the overage amount the way they treat other projects, in that the funding would be a split of 80 percent and 20 percent in which PennDOT would pay the former and the authority would pay the latter.

The authority paying only 20 percent of the overage, or an additional \$400,000, was "much more palatable for us," French said. In fact, a \$400,000 funding application for the business park project from the Appalachian Regional Commission that could not be used for Wayland Smith Drive has been resubmitted to the state to use to fund the project. French said the authority has received "pretty strong support" from U.S. Rep. John P. Murtha, D-Johnstown, and the state to indicate the money can be used for the Matthew Drive Extension project. The funding must meet federal as well as state requirements.

French said the contract for the road was awarded last month, and the authority will vote next Tuesday to ratify the award. French said plans are to have Matthew Drive Extension operational by the end of 2007, to coincide with opening of the new Wal-Mart Super Center. The business park also houses numerous other businesses, such as doctor's offices, the CareerLink center and the county Mental Health/Mental Retardation office. Plans are to construct a Chili's Restaurant and other local and national stores in close proximity to the Wal-Mart Super Center.

The Matthew Drive Extension project was delayed for months last summer pending issuance of a permit from the state Department of Environmental Protection to allow construction of the road. An issue involving wetlands mitigation had to be resolved at the site before the DEP permit could be issued.

Penn Development was the low bidder for the project. Two other bids were received, including a \$7,669,392.40 bid from Plum Contracting Inc. and a \$9,025,422 bid from Walsh Construction Company, according to French.

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