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Economic woes don't deter business park progress

By Amy Revak , Herald-Standard

Despite the recent economic downturn, the dirt continues to fly at the Fayette County Business Park on Route 40 in South Union Township.

The business park, being developed by the Fayette County Redevelopment Authority, now includes a National City bank building that will open next week.

The bank is the first business being opened on property owned by Synergy Development Fayette. Allan Wampler of Synergy Tuesday told the redevelopment authority that the new bank site will open next week, and the former location at the Uniontown Mall will close for business on Friday.

Wampler said construction would begin on an Arby's restaurant building next week at the business park. Also, Verizon will begin construction for a new site by the end of the month.

Wampler said Synergy Drive in the business park is finished and a ribbon cutting will be held at 10 a.m. on Thursday.

"Everything has gone extremely well in spite of the economy," Wampler said. "Hopefully we will finalize the next phase."

Authority chairman Ken Finney said he drives by the bank every day and it "looks great."

Late last year, the redevelopment authority sold Synergy an 8.39-acre lot at the business park for \$2 million to develop into a site with restaurants and retail stores. The Synergy property includes five different lots.

During Tuesday's meeting, the authority voted to approve two agreements dealing with the future Arby's site and the National City Bank site.

The business park currently includes numerous restaurants, retail stores and medical offices, including a Wal-Mart Super Center, a group of shops with a Chinese restaurant and an Oreck store, a Sonic restaurant, an I-HOP, an Applebee's restaurant, the Career Link office, Pasta Lorenzo, Fayette County Mental Health/Mental Retardation, McMillen Engineering and a Super 8 Motel.

Plans are also in the works to construct an information and transportation hub for Fayette Area Coordinated Transportation.

In other business, the authority approved an agreement with Uniontown Hospital regarding the Infrastructure Facilities Improvement Program grant that was previously received for the expansion and renovation project at the hospital.

Executive director Andrew French said last year receipt of the \$8.44 million IFIP grant was announced for Uniontown Hospital, which will be repaid over a 20-year period. French said the grant is similar to the \$8.1 million IFIP grant received by Cedarwood Development for the Wal-Mart project at the business park.

The hospital will repay the IFIP funding at a rate of \$422,000 a year for 20 years.

The IFIP money is what French previously called "tax increment financing." He said the expansion is expected to create 150 new jobs, which will create more payroll taxes that will be paid into the IFIP program. He said it is a win for the state because the state gets the tax dollars and a win locally because the money comes back into the area via the grant program.

The program, administered through the state Department of Community and Economic Development, grants money to eligible applicants, such as redevelopment authorities.

In May 2007 the authority learned it would receive \$8.1 million in state IFIP money to assist Cedarwood with the Wal-Mart Super Center project.

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The state cash, repaid in the form of approximately \$813,000 per year for 10 years, will be used to offset debt for infrastructure work - such as roads, water and sewerage - the private developer has incurred for the project.

The authority approved motions to submit applications for a \$1 million through the state Redevelopment Assistance Capital Program for the Fallingwater parking lot and roadway improvement project and to apply for \$100,000 through the state Housing and Redevelopment Assistance Program for the Falls Market Redevelopment project in Ohiopyle Borough.

The authority also approved a motion for a cooperation agreement with Fayette County to administer the 2009 Community Development Block Grant program. French said the authority administers the CDBG grants for the county and 11 entitlement municipalities.

He said a total of about \$2.1 million would be received this year, including \$1.7 million in annual CDBG money and \$450,500 in economic stimulus funding.

Because the stimulus amount must be used within 120 days of receipt of the money, French said it would be a very dynamic year for the authority in terms of infrastructure work.

"We have a lot of projects," French said.

"All we need now is good weather," Finney said.



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