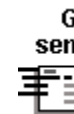


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Tuesday, September 26, 2006

Study sought for cycling arena in Brownsville

By Christine Haines, Herald-Standard
09/26/2006

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BROWNSVILLE - Borough council is being asked to vote tonight to allow a feasibility study to be done regarding the possibility of constructing an Olympic-style cycling arena, or velodrome, in downtown Brownsville.

A representative from the real estate firm CB Richard Ellis, Jack Norris, has met with members of the council and the Greater Brownsville Area Chamber of Commerce regarding the proposal that could mean millions of dollars worth of development in the community. Norris could not be reached for comment Monday.

The velodrome appears in the 2005-2006 state budget, with \$15 million listed in the budget for the "construction, infrastructure, and other related costs for a velodrome, including administrative and training facilities." The capital budget also contains \$5 million for a "Brownsville revitalization project, including acquisition, demolition, renovation and construction of new and existing downtown buildings."

According to Brownsville chamber member Ray Koffler, the project goes far beyond the money requested in the capital budget and the matching funds that would be required.

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The drawing above shows a proposed velodrome or Olympic-style cycling arena that is being proposed for downtown Brownsville. "This is a \$123 million project," Koffler said. "They need to

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realize this might be the utopia for Brownsville."

Koffler was part of a contingent from Brownsville that met recently with representatives from CB Richard Ellis, an international real estate services company with corporate offices in El Segundo, Calif., and a branch office in Pittsburgh. One of his relatives works for the real estate management firm.

"They've been commissioned by the U.S. Olympic Committee, particularly the cycling part of it, to find a location for cycling in the eastern United States," Koffler said.

No one from USA Cycling could be reached for comment Monday.

According to Larry Segal, the executive director of the Governor's Office of Housing and Community Development, the office overseeing the downtown Brownsville code enforcement project, being in the capital budget is no guarantee of funding, but it is the place to start.

"Being in the capital budget is a good thing. If it's not in the capital budget, it can't be funded," Segal said.

"This is a major, major project," Segal said. "Our whole focus now is on the downtown. We're thrilled someone is interested, but we want to make sure it's real. Where's the private money?"

Segal said there are many questions that need to be answered.

"I don't know who the developer is or who the project sponsor is, but there are a lot of details to be worked out before asking the governor to release the money. The capital budget is a matching program. Where is the rest of the money going to come from? What we all need to be cautious about is that anything that is proposed is real," Segal said.

How it got into the capital budget is another matter.

"I don't know where it started. There are many, many projects in the capital budget. It did not come from the governor's office," Segal said.

Borough officials say they didn't make the request for the money in the budget and they don't know who did.

"I have no idea," said Mayor Lewis Hosler. "I don't even know that it's in there."

Council President Jack Lawver said it was his understanding that state Rep. H. William DeWeese, D-Waynesburg, made the request, but Lawver said he doesn't know who approached DeWeese.

"Anybody can put a project in if they contact the right people," Lawver said. "Getting it put on and getting it are two different things."

Tom Andrews, a spokesman for DeWeese, said the legislator's staff was approached by individuals from the USA Cycling Association about the project, but DeWeese himself never met with the individuals.

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"At this point, there are no definite commitments from the state or the cycling association," Andrews said. "If private financing develops, we'll see where things go."

Projects in the capital budget may be funded through the governor's office or through an appropriations bill in the Legislature.

Lawver said the plans he saw would call for the area bounded by Market Street, Brown Street, Seneca Street and Dunlap Creek to be leveled and the velodrome constructed in that area, along with a parking garage.

Koffler said the plan would relocate the post office and the library, but some of the other buildings would remain.

"They're not going to tear all the buildings down. There's a lot of historical credits in those buildings," Koffler said.

"It's part of the downtown historic district and all the buildings around the square are contributing buildings to the historic district," Lawver said. "I asked if it could be located anywhere else and I didn't even have the question out of my mouth and they said no."

Lawver said the proposed site is approximately two acres.

"We have several sites in town that are five or six acre sites with nothing on them," Lawver said.

Chamber President Frank Ricco said the project has been going on for months, though the chamber was made aware of it just recently.

"We're just asking council to take a good look at it to make sure it's not an opportunity that we're passing up," Ricco said. "If it's something that's going to benefit this community, it should be done. We have nothing."

Council will meet tonight at 7 p.m. at the borough building.

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