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Local Interest
Calendars
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The Greene County Messenger
Other Calkins Media Sites
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Home > News > Archives

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Businesses expected to open at park by end of year

By Amy Zalar, Herald-Standard
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Dirt continues to fly at the Fayette County Business Park, with more businesses slated to open at the South Union Township site before the end of the year.

During Tuesday's monthly meeting of the Fayette County Redevelopment Authority, executive director Andrew French said the smaller retail shopping center in the front of the Cedarwood Development Inc. "Fayette Crossings" development should be open in October or November, as well as the Applebee's Restaurant. French said Cedarwood is working to finalize tenants for the shopping center, and the list should be released soon. The business park is located along Route 40.

French said the 200,000-square-foot Wal-Mart Super Center building is slated for delivery at the site by the end of the year and the store should open early in 2008. The new store will replace a smaller Wal-Mart in Cherry Tree Plaza.

Authority member Ross DiMarco said it is hard to believe that the property used to be a field. "Who would have thought?" he said. The site now contains buildings, roads and infrastructure.

French said another restaurant, Pasta Lorenzo, should also be open before the end of the year. Some of the tenants the business park contains include a motel, engineering firm, doctor offices, Fayette County Career Link, Fayette County Mental Health/Mental Retardation.

French said rumors about a Sam's Club and other businesses opening in the area are not confirmed, adding that with three developers working in close proximity, namely Cedarwood, Armstrong and Widewaters, all are likely to be attempting to recruit businesses.

Authority chairman Kenneth Finney, who works at the business park, said enhancements to the old cemetery in the business park are completed. He said a monument and white picket fence have been added.

In another item related to the business park, French reported that the authority has received a contract from the state for an \$8.1 million state grant that will be used to assist Cedarwood. The state cash will be paid in the form of approximately \$813,000 per year for 10 years, and is from the Infrastructure Facilities Improvement Program through the state Department of Community and Economic Development. The money 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 the agreement for the grant.

The authority approved the submission of the 2007-08 weatherization grant application in the amount of \$547,892. French said the amount is an 8 percent reduction from last year. He said between 95 and 190 families will be helped by the funding. French said this year they are targeting "high energy consumers" in addition to the elderly and handicapped. He said high-energy consumers are those who spend a lot on heating. The program, which helps low-income people, has upgraded more than 8,500 homes since 1975. French said there are 700 people on the waiting list for assistance.

Finney said the county weatherization program is one of the oldest and best programs throughout the commonwealth.

The authority also voted to authorize a cooperation agreement between the redevelopment authority and Fayette County for administration of a \$267,000 HOME Investment Partnerships Program Grant. The money will be used to supplement funds already received to open a Fairweather Lodge home for up to eight individuals with mental health issues in Connellsville.

French said the county commissioners have already approved submission of the grant, and the authority will merely administer it.

The home, which will be located at 508 S. Pittsburgh St., is opposed by some of the neighbors. Authority member Dee John said it is a shame everyone in the community can't be on board for the project, which French said doesn't require approval of the city.

"You've got to give them a chance," John said. French said although individuals spoke against having the home in the neighborhood, some people also spoke in favor of it during the commissioners' meeting.

In other items, the authority voted to sell property located at 105 Poplar St., Masontown, to Thomas and Constance Guappone in the amount of \$2,500. French said the 40- by 100-foot lot formerly contained a building that has been torn down and the Guappone's want to use the property for a side yard.

During the annual meeting, the board voted to retain the same slate of officers for the upcoming year.

The officers are: Kenneth M. Finney Jr., chairman; Ross F. DiMarco, vice chairman/assistant secretary; James S. Woleslagle, treasurer; Rob Sleighter, assistant treasurer; and Dee John, secretary.

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