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New plan could be good news for Brownsville

02/07/2008
Updated 02/14/2008 12:06:04 AM EST

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It's good news is that the Fayette County Redevelopment Authority is developing a plan to revitalize downtown Brownsville. The authority board this week approved a contract to accept \$2 million in state funding to start that ambitious initiative, although all details of the proposal were not immediately available.

Although not everything about the strategy was known Tuesday night, some sort of serious blueprint is obviously in the works. The FCRA board has formally approved a redevelopment proposal for the Brownsville Borough Redevelopment project, which means someone has put a lot of work and thought into the effort.

This apparently is a big enough deal that it must ultimately be approved by the Fayette County commissioners. There also seems to be a need for Brownsville Borough Council to take action.

According to FCRA Executive Director Andrew French, who provided details on the basic framework, the \$2 million in state Main Street Growing Greener II funds is the "first influx" of state funding to start the process.

French says the effort will involve 30 properties in downtown Brownsville, and the plan involves acquiring properties and some demolition.

"We can't do what we want until we have control," says French, offering yet another clue as to what's in the works.

As everyone knows, most if not all of downtown Brownsville is owned by Ernest Liggett, with whom the borough has been embroiled in controversy for many years. If the redevelopment authority needs control of its targeted properties in order to implement its revitalization plan, we see two ways for that to happen: Purchase those parcels outright from Liggett, or use some legal mechanism to obtain them, such as eminent domain.

Given the huge amount of public funds involved - \$2 million for starters, with more likely to come - we eagerly anticipate knowing more details. Some plan obviously exists, unless we're to believe that the state Department of Community and Economic Development is so cavalier as to throw \$2 million your way to spend as you see fit.

Brownsville has long been a poster child for the decay of a downtown area. Through the years residents there and in Fayette County have been teased with promises of redevelopment, including some grandiose plans that seemed rooted in wishful thinking.

This time, let's hope someone has put together something doable. Even if there's no proposed immediate use for the properties as part of the package, some strategic demolition would be a good start.

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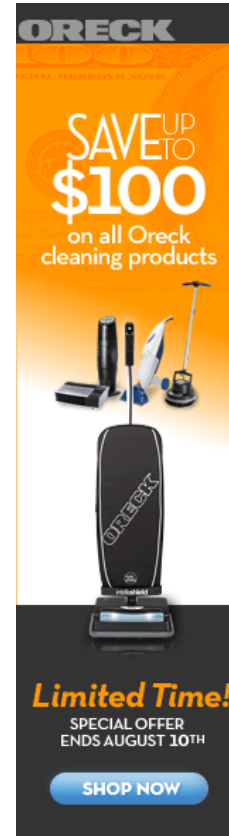
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