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Commissioners act to advance construction projects

By Amy Karpinsky, Herald-Standard
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The Fayette County Commissioners took action Tuesday to move forward with two separate \$3 million construction projects.

At the agenda meeting, the commissioners voted to place on Thursday's meeting motions relating to a new Fayette Area Coordinated Transportation site that will be located at the Connellsville Airport and a new Fayette County Mental Health/Mental Retardation building that will be constructed at the Fayette County Business Park.

When complete, the FACT site will contain a 20,000-foot main terminal and a separate bus garage on a 4.3-acre tract. Each of the county's 32 FACT vehicles will be kept at the site. A combination of local, state and federal funding is being used to fund the \$3 million project.

Following a request from FACT director Michelle Grant Shumar, the commissioners voted to place on Thursday's agenda a motion to award a contract for earthmoving and associated construction activities to Steve Patterson Co. for \$315,000 for the FACT site. Shumar said it was the lowest of two responsible bids received for the project.

Shumar said the other bid came in at \$359,000. She said there were half-dozen inquiries about the project, but only two bids were received. Shumar said she is consulting with legislators to schedule an official groundbreaking event for the site. Commissioner Sean M. Cavanagh reminded Shumar to be sure to invite U.S. Rep. John Murtha (D-Johnstown), since he procured federal funding for the project.

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Commission chairman Vincent A. Vicites said approving the motion is the "first step in getting the building built."

Later in the meeting, the commissioners voted to place on Thursday's agenda motions to advertise for bids for the new FACT transit center as well as the new MH/MR building.

The new MH/MR building, which is expected to cost approximately \$3 million, will be situated in the county business park, along Route 40 in South Union Township. The 2-1/2-story building with a partial basement will contain approximately 22,500 square feet. The building will feature an open lobby with a large atrium space

Currently, the agency occupies part of the second floor of the Health Center building, the entire eighth floor of the National City Bank building and a portion of the second floor of the National City Bank building and also rents a conference room and storage space in the National City Bank building.

While the project was first initiated more than a year ago, it was delayed when complications arose with the purchase agreement from the county redevelopment authority.

Prior to voting move ahead with advertising for bids, Cavanagh asked Vicites if he wanted to delay the project until after the election. Although Vicites said he had no plans to delay the project, Cavanagh said he didn't believe him. He said the project needs to be streamlined.

"Let's get this thing done," Cavanagh said.

Architect Michael S. Molar said the construction documents will take five to six weeks to complete and the project may be delayed until after the election because of that fact. Vicites said he signed the purchase agreement for the property the last week and wouldn't have done that if he wanted to delay the project.

Federal and state funding is in place for the new MH/MR building.

In other business, Roy (Barney) Shipley, head of the Fayette County Emergency Management Agency, said the county's HAZMAT team has received temporary approval for recertification from the state. He said the state inspection for the new HazMat building at the Connellsville Airport is slated for Oct. 28.

Shipley said new building is under roof and closed up with the exception of doors. He said the target completion date for the facility is mid-November.

While asking for approval of the county's new strategic plan, Bob Junk of Fayette Forward presented each of the three commissioners with a copy of the document.

Junk explained that last year a grant was received to revise the plan and throughout the revision, six public meetings were held. He said the plan will include statistics detailing the background and history of the county.

Commissioner Ronald M. Nehls said he wouldn't be able to read the document by Thursday and therefore, not able to approve it. However, he commended all the work that went into the plan. "This is wonderful," Nehls said.

Cavanagh said the plan doesn't have to be approved, it can be endorsed, and made a motion to do so. Vicites commended Junk for his work on the plan. He said it will be a "blueprint for the future" and a "good plan for the next five years."

Junk said the document has flexibility to change if demographics change. When Junk asked if a 20-minute power point presentation could be given on the plan on Thursday, Vicites said public comment is limited to three minutes. Instead, it was suggested that a time should be set up in the future to make the public presentation.

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