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Redevelopment authority hears about Brownsville projects

By Amy Karpinsky, Herald-Standard
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The Fayette County Redevelopment Authority heard Tuesday about two projects that will bring nearly \$400,000 to Brownsville Borough for downtown revitalization projects.

Executive director Raymond C. Polaski announced that U.S. Rep. John Murtha has secured a \$298,230 line item through the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development to assist with finishing the Brownsville Wharf. Polaski said a portion of the money can be finally used as a match to \$125,000 obtained by State Rep. H. William DeWeese, D-Waynesburg to rehabilitate the wharf.

Polaski said the redevelopment authority previously agreed to step forward to do the wharf project and needs to finish it.

Regarding a separate project, assistant executive director Andrew French said the authority is expecting to receive \$95,000 through the state Department of Community and Economic Development to help Brownsville. French said \$70,000 of that amount is dedicated for the purchase of a key building in the downtown area. The building at 31 Market St. is commonly referred to as the "Odd Fellows Building." French said the "very colorful" building is one of better buildings in terms of conditions in downtown Brownsville.

The Brownsville Area Revitalization Corporation (BARC) is purchasing the building, and French said BARC intends to operate it as a commercial site. "They want to maintain it as a people place," he said.

As a means to both of those ends, the authority took two

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separate actions.

The authority approved a cooperation agreement with Brownsville Borough for an Economic Development Initiative application to HUD to support various community development projects throughout the borough, including the wharf. The authority also authorized Polaski to execute a sub recipient agreement with BARC for the expenditure of Housing and Development Assistance funding through the DCED for the Odd Fellows Building.

The authority also approved the filing of a pre-application to the U.S. Department of Agriculture for a housing preservation grant in the amount of \$137,140. Polaski said the money will be used to rehabilitate household of people who have 50 percent median income or less, which accounts for 75 percent of people on the waiting list. Qualified areas include boroughs and townships with populations of less than 5,000 people.

French said it is a competitive grant in which only two are awarded in the state. He said seven additional households should be finished with the funding. He said this year the authority will spend \$1 million in housing rehabilitation to help more than 50 households.

The authority also approved a cooperation agreement with the county for a competitive Community Development Block Grant application to DCED for a borough-wide water system improvement project in Ohiopyle Borough.

Polaski said two million people per year visit the small municipality and use the water system. He said the borough is under the direction of the state Department of Environmental Protection to upgrade the system. French said the borough only has 34 households and 77 people and a budget of less than \$10,000 per year and receives an additional \$7,000 a year for water a sewage.

French said with a DEP mandate, it is difficult for the borough to obtain the \$500,000 necessary to upgrade the system so the authority stepped in and is going after a competitive grant.

During the director's report, Polaski announced that the authority will soon be seeking proposals to building two 1,200-square-foot three-bedroom homes in Mountain View, Georges Township. Polaski said after the homes are constructed, plans are to recruit eligible low-income individuals to use the authority's homeowner's program to purchase them.

Polaski said it is a first for the authority. "We've never built houses as a redevelopment authority. We've remodeled but never built before," he said.

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