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Brownsville hopes grant can help launch project

By **Joe Napsha**

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Improving Dunlap Creek in Brownsville, developing a canoe-kayak launch site into the Monongahela River and exploring the idea of a creating a hiking trail along the creek are among Brownsville's goals for \$25,000 of a \$50,000 grant from a Pittsburgh foundation.

James Lawver, president of Brownsville Council, sees the potential development of a canoe-kayak launch at the mouth of Dunlap Creek and the Monongahela River, as well as the creation of a hiking trail along the creek, as more steps in the efforts to breathe new life into Brownsville's downtown district. The project would include cleaning up the creek from the river to the borough's sewage plant, a distance of less than a mile, Lawver said.

The Claude Worthington Benedum Foundation awarded a \$50,000 grant to the borough, which will use one-half of the grant to pay for consulting services provided by Catherine McCollom, director of the River Town Program, which helps towns use the river as an asset around which community and economic development can occur.

"This grant will help the borough purchase additional time for Cathy (McCollom) to do planning," that helps promote economic development in the community, said James Denova, vice president of the Benedum Foundation.

As director of the River Town Program, "Cathy is the orchestra conductor," Denova said.

The other half of the grant will be used for matching funds for a \$50,000 state Department of Conservation and Natural Resources' Community Conservation Partnership Program grant to develop the boat launch, Lawver said.

"We hope with this project to encourage use of the existing wharf in combination with access via Dunlap Creek. One of our goals through the River Town Program is to encourage use of that steadily improving asset, the Mon River," McCollom stated.

McCollom, whose consulting firm, McCollom Development Strategies LLC of Confluence, specializes in economic development and community revitalization planning, said she will apply for the Community Conservation Partnership Program grant on behalf of the borough.

The deadline for applying for the state grant is April 16 and the state will notify the winners of the grant this fall, said Christina Novak, a spokeswoman for the DCNR.

If successful, the grant funds will be awarded in December and work would begin and be finished by the summer of 2016, McCollom said.

After a launch access point is developed on Dunlap Creek, the borough will submit a follow-up application, probably in April 2016, to the state for riverfront trail planning the length of Dunlap Creek through the borough. If the state funds that application, a trail route would be completed by the summer of 2017, McCollom said.

The potential for improvement along the riverfront and Dunlap Creek are just part of the redevelopment projects proposed for Brownsville. TREK Development Group of Pittsburgh wants to build a \$7 million, 24-apartment senior citizen housing complex on three parcels in downtown Brownsville.

The Fayette County Redevelopment Authority has given TREK permission to seek federal low-income housing tax credits to help finance the 45,000-square-foot housing complex. If TREK lands the tax credits, it will buy the three Market Street parcels, raze two dilapidated buildings and rehab the former G.C. Murphy Co. store.

The county redevelopment authority also wants to seeks bids for a performing arts stage at Snowden Square along Market Street, Lawver said.

"There is enough money to get that going. Hopefully, that will support other development," he said.

The state Department of Community and Economic Development's Greenway Trails & Recreation Program has provided the Redevelopment Authority of Fayette County with a \$175,000 grant to make a community and regional park at Snowden Square.

Andrew French, executive director of the redevelopment authority, said the county is seeking an additional grant from a Pittsburgh foundation for the first phase of the Snowden Square project. The redevelopment authority will seek proposals for final engineering services needed before seeking bids for the stage, French said.

The authority probably will advertise in the late second quarter for bids to build the performing arts stage, French said. The idea for the project was developed two years ago by the Students in Action club at Brownsville Area High School as an effort to breathe life into downtown Brownsville..

"I'm very excited with what is going on there. I think the community has great potential for a waterfront recreation economy," Denova said.

Denova said he believes the development potential in Brownsville has opened up the community to funding from other Pittsburgh-based foundations, including The Heinz Endowments and the Richard King Mellon Foundation.

While the proposed projects may not mean the borough can see a "light at the end of the tunnel," in terms of redevelopment, Lawver remarked that the projects planned for the downtown business district and the riverfront means "at least this a little flicker is going on."

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