

BUSINESS

Designer: Cranberry Creek Gateway project will be area asset

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Once the proposed Cranberry Creek Gateway project is developed, it will be an asset to the entire area, one of its designers says.

Hazleton City Councilman Joe Yannuzzi, chairman of the Mountain Council of Governments (COG) and co-chairman of the Cranberry Creek Gateway Committee, Thursday morning gave COG members a presentation on how the committee intends to develop the mine-scarred, 366-acre site at the Route 924 entrance to Hazleton.

Yannuzzi said the committee's thinking at the beginning was to beautify the land and clean up the abandoned mine holes on the land.

"But we will accept no dredge," Yannuzzi said.

Yannuzzi stressed that as the committee develops the parcel, it will be flexible with ideas on how to do it.

"We have a design plan, but it is not in concrete," Yannuzzi said. "When the mayor (Barletta) said he

wanted to build an amphitheater (on adjacent where the city landfill used to be), we eliminated an amphitheater from our plan.

"Now a developer who wants to build an icebox (indoor skating rink) wants the same parcel of land, where he wants to build some restaurants and other things with the ice box."

Yannuzzi said developers' interest in the project will make it become a reality.

"It is evolving," Yannuzzi said of the project. "Who comes up with the best idea will get the acreage they want. We will be responsive to the developer."

Yannuzzi used a map to describe how the committee planned to develop the parcel.

"We were planning a golf course," Yannuzzi said. "But we don't want to compete with anyone else. If we can't build something different there, we won't build anything."

Outside of its economic impact, Yannuzzi said it plays another important role – as an alternate way to get out of the Valmont Industrial Park.

The northernmost tip of the Cranberry Creek land is right next to Valmont – so an access road from Valmont is planned to go through Cranberry Creek and exit onto Route 924.

Yannuzzi also said residential development is planned. "We are talking with several developers."

The southeastern tip of the property – right at the intersection of Route 924 and Interstate 81 – has been reserved by Pagnotti Enterprises, one of two landowners CAN DO and the Greater Hazleton Chamber of Commerce bought the 366-acre parcel from.

Yannuzzi said the Pagnotti firm intends to develop a hotel at the site. Next to it will be other commercial development.

COG Director Dan Guydish said he wanted COG members to know what Cranberry Creek is all about.

"I thought it was important we know about this project, because it has implications for all of us," Guydish said. "Economically, it can help all of us grow. It's a great project. It helps us to protect the future."

Guydish said COG members intend to do some of their own cleanup along Route 924 soon.

"We did some planting in the spring and now we want to go back and spruce things up," Guydish said.

Meanwhile, drawings of entrance signs to various COG communities – created with a grant the COG received – are going to the state Department of Transportation (PENNDOT) for approval.

"It is our hope to get those signs in the ground before winter," Guydish said.

An application for a grant to purchase a sewer camera that will be shared by six of the COG's 14 member municipalities was submitted.

If the grant is received, Guydish said the camera will be shared by the City of Hazleton, the Hazleton Area School District, Freeland and McAdoo boroughs, the Freeland Municipal Authority and Butler Township.

And six governmental entities have also indicated to Guydish they would work together in enforcing one another's junk car

laws to get them off the streets. The municipalities would honor each other's abandoned vehicle law and people would not get around the law by moving the vehicle from place to place.

The entities that will participate will be the City of Hazleton; the Hazleton Area School District; Freeland, McAdoo and Beaver Meadows boroughs, and Butler and Foster townships.

Municipal officials also indicated their interest to share a pothole filler, so Guydish will pursue a grant.

But Robert Dougherty, public works director for the City of Hazleton as well as the city engineer, recommended Guydish include a heated tank with the filler.

Dougherty said the city likes the pothole filler it has, but once asphalt manufacturing plants shut down for the winter, city crews have to travel to Bloomsburg to get material because unless materials plants are open, material is difficult to get. Dougherty said the city has to travel to Bloomsburg to get material.