

Council backs 3 development ideas; 50 jobs may come

April 30, 2010

By R.A. WALKER - rwalker@sungazette.com

City Council gave its support to three development initiatives Thursday night, one of which is being described as likely to result in up to 50 high-paying gas industry-related jobs.

The votes were all 5-0 and the comments by council about the project - for the most part - supportive and optimistic.

The gas industry jobs will be on the former Kennedy-King housing project property in the West End, which is developed by Moran Industries and will have its own railroad siding.

Article Photos



The 10-acre Keystone Opportunity Zone site was originally planned as a warehousing complex, but the railroad siding into the the site attracted a firm that provides support services for the gas industry and will result in what Mayor Gabriel J. Campana touted as "family-sustaining" jobs.

Council voted on two action items related to the project - one awarding a contract for construction of the rail siding, the other amending the contract with the project's engineer to include additional services needed by the future tenant.

The site is being prepared with a \$1 million state grant and a \$250,000 federal rail assistance grant.

Also approved was a resolution of support for the proposed reuse of the Brodart warehouse property along Memorial Avenue.

Habitat for Humanity was approached by Brodart about using the land solely for home construction, but it may be building on only part of the site because the resolution of support describes it as a "public-private partnership" available for both

"new affordable housing ... and the adaptive reuse of some of the (Brodart) structures."

No city funds have been committed to the project, but grant funding would be needed for demolition of all or part of the massive complex.

Currently under way is an environmental study coordinated by the county with grant funding. The results of the study should be available by mid-summer.

Also approved was use of \$20,000 in Urban Development Action Grant money to help create a courtyard on Pine Street between West Third and West Fourth streets.

The courtyard would be on the site of the D.O. Fisher building, which is described as structurally unsafe and slated for demolition.

The buildings on either side will be upgraded to accommodate retail and restaurant businesses and up-scale housing on upper floors.

Council President J. Marlyne Whaley said it was "a great project" but took the mayor to task for appearing on a 5 p.m. news program praising the project before council had voted, during which she felt the news report left viewers with a mistaken impression the project already was set to go.

The mayor said he "can't control the press" and insisted he never told the press the (council) vote "was a done deal."

Council Vice-President Bill Hall and Councilwoman Gerry Fausnaught were absent from the meeting.