

## Opportunities outlined for Renovo area

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LOCK HAVEN - Call it the exact opposite of a "perfect storm" at Renovo - one that bodes well for extensive work and upgrades for Ontario Avenue and vicinity.

Representatives of the Lewisburg-based SEDA-Council of Governments expressed a great deal of confidence and enthusiasm at a recent work session of the Clinton County commissioners, as they outlined a series of economic and infrastructure opportunities that appear to be coming together - all at the right time - for Renovo.

The latest news is the commissioners' pending approval of SEDA-COG's work on a significant grant application.

The commissioners are expected to follow through Thursday with SEDA-COG's contract to create a competitive, Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) application on behalf of the borough.

The proposed initiative will combine with several other efforts that could create a whirlwind of activity on and beneath the avenue beginning this summer - if all goes according to plan.

SEDA-COG officials William C. Seigel, Jamie Shrawder and Kristin McLaughlin recently sat down with Commissioners Joel Long, Jeff Snyder and Pete Smeltz to outline all the plans.

Seigel said efforts initially focused on a Department of Community and Economic Development program could provide up to \$750,000 toward the effort.

"We felt the competitive grant program is applicable to Renovo," Seigel said, while a special CDBG set-aside for blight reduction was not particularly a good fit.

Staff members took a closer look at the set-aside and said the attached strings - an in-place comprehensive plan, pro-active code enforcement and other conditions - made it a tough sell for the borough. (The borough is apparently moving ahead with those steps, regardless.)

But in the meantime, Seigel said, word arrived of a CBDG opportunity that raised the standard competitive grant from \$500,000 to \$750,000.

The fact that the borough has already established grant qualifications via a survey focusing on the federal definition for low-to-moderate income is a plus, specifically for the Ontario project area, with census data to back it up, Seigel said.

Seigel said the recent cohesion of community and volunteerism represented by the PRR organization, and a new Renovo Borough Council committed to the developing new ideas and aggressively pursuing the project, have joined to open the doors to opportunity.

However it is described, Pennsylvania Infrastructure Investment Authority (Pennvest) funding could replace water lines, PennDOT could schedule repaving of the avenue, and several other resources are targeting the demolition of unsafe or blighted buildings.

Pennvest is a state agency that provides low-interest loans and some grants to fund sewer and water infrastructure upgrades statewide. Officials are still in the application stage with Pennvest, but early dialogue with the authority appears to focus on doing the work entirely via a grant.

"My understanding is that it could be in the \$3 million range," Seigel said.

Also combined with all those stages is a PennDOT road project.

According to Seigel, paving of Ontario Avenue is slated for this coming summer, and other agencies are trying to put the pieces in place so the work beneath the street is done before the paving begins.

Finally, there is a developing effort to improve public access to the West Branch of the Susquehanna River in the borough, partly through SEDA-COG, the Susquehanna Greenway Partnership's (SGP) River Town program and other entities.

Very preliminary talks are taking place in regard to three potential funding applications, one via the state Department of Conservation and Natural Resources Community Conservation Partnership program, another through the Commonwealth Financing Authority, and possibly a third grant application through the National Park Service, officials said.

The discussion is very preliminary, officials emphasized, with a long-term goal of building a river access launch and park, somewhere in the area of Fifth Street in the borough, and possibly a walking trail along the water.

Blighted properties are part of the equation, a challenge the borough is targeting while working to bring people and financial resources to the table. At a recent River Town public forum attended by about 100 people, the removal of blight was listed as a top challenge.

Renovo Councilwoman Kari Kepler confirmed that the borough is aggressively seeking funding sources to upgrade the water lines and sidewalks with the goal of repaving Erie and Ontario avenues.

"I'm hopeful that this and the Pennvest grant will be successful, because we need to get the infrastructure fixed first so we can move on from there," she said.

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