

HERMITAGE

City officials eye new development strategy

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By Joe Pinchot, *Herald Staff Writer*

Hermitage Community and Economic Development Commission and city staff members have put a lot of time and effort in recent years to developing the LindenPointe technical business park.

With construction of the eCenter@LindenPointe and the Hermitage Training and Workforce Development Center now completed and a non-profit corporation in place to manage their operations, it's time to set new economic and community development priorities, officials said Thursday.

The first priority likely will be reevaluating the city's marketing plan, said Assistant City Manager Gary M. Gulla. City officials have developed two videos highlighting aspects of city life - both of which can be seen on YouTube - and have run advertisements in area publications to promote activities and initiatives. The plan could be tweaked to focus on more general aspects of the city, such as quality of life and its assets, and try for a more regional presence, said Community Planner Jeremy P. Coxe. One idea was to more widely market the activities that already big draws in the city - the Holiday Light Parade, Buhl Day, the Hermitage Arts Festival and the Father's Day Car Show, Gulla said.

Although city officials have not forsaken recreation - as evidenced by this year's opening of the athletic fields complex on South Darby Road - more emphasis could be placed there, officials said. The city has completed most of the recommendations of its parks and recreation plan, and that could be updated, Gulla said. City Manager Gary P. Hinkson said the city could create a trails and pedestrian facilities plan to start connecting some of the publicly and privately funded walking and biking ways already in place.

On the economic development side, Commission Chairman Rex W. Knisley said the city needs to be positioned to benefit from the shale drilling boom that has started putting dollars in Mercer County. Industries that make pipe and other equipment that is or could be used by the drilling industry have taken orders from drillers, he said. The city might have an opportunity to sell treated waste water to drillers - it would be cheaper than the water sold by Aqua Pennsylvania - once the treatment plant expansion is completed late next year, Knisley said. In terms of actual shale drilling well in the city, "I don't anticipate that," Knisley said, but the ripple effect could be steady, he said.

On more mundane issues, officials will press ahead with street and storm water projects, both associated with and separate from the Neighborhood Investment Program; contribute to the State Street Study being compiled by a consultant; and work to update the planned technical park zoning classification, Hinkson said.

"Although we have had success, there remains much work to be completed," Hinkson said. The commission and city officials reviewed 2011 projects, including building a stormwater detention pond on North Hermitage Road, below the Hunters Woods residential development; and sidewalk and intersection improvements on North Buhl Farm Drive and East State Street at Maple Drive.

For 2012, officials have a slate of road and storm water improvements projects planned, many accelerated by a hike in the local services tax and an upcoming bond issue.