

GCIDA to consider Mather coal refuse dump reuse

Observer-Reporter, published: January 21, 2015

By Bob Niedbala, Staff Writer

WAYNESBURG – Greene County Industrial Development Authority Wednesday discussed developing a strategy to determine possible uses for the Mather coal refuse dump once reclamation work at the site is completed.

A contractor hired by the state Department of Environmental Protection began work at the Mather site to reclaim the property using sediment removed from the now-dry Duke Lake at Ryerson Station State Park.

The authority owns the Mather site and has a license agreement with DEP for access to the property to complete the reclamation work.

The authority discussed possible uses once reclamation is completed, including an idea to partner with an individual or company to use part of the site for a commercial agricultural operation, such as a hydroponic farm, that could also serve as an educational center.

The board Wednesday discussed whether there would be any restrictions on the use of the land after the reclamation is completed and whether portions of the site could be sold for development.

Ernie DeHaas, the authority's solicitor, said he would investigate whether portions of the property can be sold by the authority under terms of the reclamation grant and statutes governing the authority.

Crystal Simmons, authority manager, was asked to talk to DEP engineers to determine how reclaimed sites like Mather can be used and what steps the authority would have to take to move forward.

Joe Simatic, GCIDA board chairman, said he would like to begin developing a plan for the property now. "I'd hate to see them get done (with the reclamation), and there is no plan in place," he said.

In other business, the board reorganized and re-elected Simatic chairman; Sheila Stewart, vice chairman; Jason Neighbors, secretary; and Andrew Corfont, treasurer. The fifth member is Mike Belding.

The authority will meet the second Wednesday of each month at 8:30 a.m. in the conservation district conference room in the mezzanine of the Fort Jackson Building. In November, the board will meet the third Monday because of Veterans Day.

Simmons is the authority's new manager. She worked with the authority for the last three months under Robbie Matesic, director of the county's department of economic development, who also served as the authority's acting director.

Simmons gave a report on a new website being developed to help market commercial and industrial properties in Greene County.

The county commissioners earlier entered a contract with GIS Planning for software for the county's site.

Information from the county's website will be included on a similar website called Pittsburgh Prospector, which covers a 10-county region in Southwestern Pennsylvania, as well as PA site search, the state's website for marketing commercial and industrial properties.

The Greene County site will give real estate agencies and others who want to sell commercial and industrial land not only local but also state and national exposure, Simmons said.

The website will include information about the county's demographics, census data, labor force information and consumer spending. Pictures and maps of specific properties can also be included on the site.

The website is being developed by the IDA, the county department of economic development and county department of information technology. It should be up and running within the next month, Simmons said.

Simmons said she also would be meeting with local real estate agencies to discuss use of the site.

Simmons reported she submitted a \$400,000 application grant to the Environmental Protection Agency to inventory and assess the county's brownfield sites.

A brownfield is land previously used for industrial or commercial purposes that may be contaminated by low levels of hazardous materials that would complicate the land being reused or redeveloped.

The grant will be used to hire a consultant to inventory the sites and to conduct assessments on those considered priorities based on factors including the hazard they may represent to the public and the possibility of reuse.

The EPA has another grant program that provides money to reclaim brownfield sites. The authority hopes to apply to that grant program after the inventory and assessments are completed and sites are identified that possibly could be reclaimed and developed.

Simmons told the board she also learned about state funding programs that also can possibly be used for site reclamations and would be investigating those funding programs as well.

The authority will be setting up a brownfield reclamation advisory committee to help guide the program.

Simmons also gave a report on the authority's revolving loan program.

The program is funded by the U.S. Department of Agriculture Rural Development and provides loans to help small businesses with fewer than 100 full time employees.

The loans offer a low interest rate and can be awarded to companies not eligible for conventional bank loans. The loans can be used to start or expand a business.

The authority currently has three loans outstanding and has about \$400,000 available for the program, Simmons said.