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Franklin County Area Development Corp.compiles available commercial properties

By JIM HOOK Senior writer

FRANKLIN COUNTY -- The nonprofit corporation that markets Franklin County to industries and commercial developers is preparing a list of properties that are available for development.

The list will include only a few properties in unzoned townships.

"We will be mapping sites (in unzoned townships) that have existing buildings or have been specifically identified by the owners for development," said L. Michael Ross, president of Franklin County Area Development Corp. "It is not our intention to identify property for development in townships that are not zoned."

FCADC is a proponent of planned economic development and growth, Ross said.

Municipalities on Interstate 81 and to the east are the county's faster growing communities and have zoning. Communities to the west of I-81, except the Borough of Mercersburg, do not have zoning. Commercial development boosts a community's real estate tax base, which is a major revenue source for the municipality and local school district.

"When folks approach us about development opportunities, we don't have a lot of places to direct them," Ross said. "They look at opportunities right along the interstate."

FCADC is a one-stop shop for regional or national businesses looking to set up shop in the county. The nonprofit development corporation coordinates site visits and state incentives.

FCADC will be making an inventory of property available for commercial, industrial or professional/office development, Ross said.

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Municipalities with zoning identify real estate for those uses, but municipalities without zoning do not.

Hamilton and eastern St. Thomas townships, unzoned townships split by U.S. 30, are prime targets for commercial development, according to the county's comprehensive plan.

Because Hamilton Township is on U.S. 30 near Chambersburg, a developer may pursue developing in the township even though the real estate does not appear on the FCADC list, according to township Secretary Deb Hollenshead. The highway has a lot of traffic, but the remainder of the township is rural.

More than two years ago a developer began the approval process for building a huge retail store north of U.S. 30 at Warm Spring Road (Pa. 995) in Hamilton Township. The Wal-Mart-like project stalled during the recession.

"We do work on a project-by-project basis with individual property owners or businesses in non-zoned municipalities," Ross said. "Developers are uneasy going into townships without zoning requirements. It's not our responsibility to direct development in a township where it hasn't been directed to be. We have never assumed it to be our role to recommend to a municipality, without being requested to do so, how or where it should develop industrial or commercial parks."

Currently the corporation lists information on its website <http://www.fcadc.com/selection/> about eight business parks in Franklin and Cumberland counties, most of them along I-81.

FCADC staff are to compile an expanded list by October. The inventory will be available in a book and online. Eventually the inventory should be included in the county's geographic information system, currently a start-up program.

The inventory will not replicate an update of the Franklin County's Comprehensive Plan currently under way, Ross said.

The county is interviewing eight consultants for the task of updating the 11-year-old comprehensive plan, according to Phil Tarquino, chief of the county Planning Department. The plan looks at land use, economic development, transportation, utilities and housing. The process should be begin this year.

Whatever information FCADC makes available will be considered for inclusion in the county comp plan, Tarquino said.



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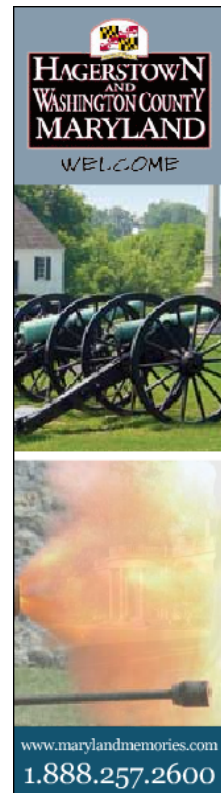
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