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Industrial park near I-78 given green light

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■ The Bethel Township supervisors and planning commission have formally given the green light for the first phase of the 323-acre Berks Park 78 industrial and warehouse complex.

Both boards voted unanimously Monday to advance the project, which aims to build nearly 3 million square feet of warehouse space and to create more than 1,000 jobs.

Supervisors Chairman Randal Haag noted that the township's approval is contingent upon finalizing a financial security and improvements agreements with the Berks County Industrial Development Authority, the developer.

According to BCIDA Executive Director Thomas C. McKeon, the development has entailed about \$43.5 million in federal, state and local funding.

A groundbreaking ceremony marking the start of infrastructure construction was held last week at the site.

Jim Hoolehan, vice president/director of operations with Blue Rock Construction Inc. of Allentown, project managers, said the first phase entails construction of an access road from Route 501 into the site and installation of a water tank for fire suppression.

"As long as we have a normal weather season, the work should be done by fall," he added.

Project manager Derek Cressman of Blue Rock told officials work on a stone entrance along Route 501 has begun, and permits from the state Department of Transportation are coming in for the widening of about one mile of Route 501.

Planners Chairman Herbert Zechman said he is pleased with "the significant progress to make the site more buyer-friendly."

Several off-site improvements will have to be completed before tractor-trailers are allowed access to the park, said Timothy J. Krall, project engineer with Spotts Stevens and McCoy Inc., Reading.

These include reconstructing the I-78/Route 501 interchange three-tenths of a mile from the park entrance and upgrading the key Route 501 intersection in the center of the town a half-mile from the park.