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County of Berks – Press Release

Commissioners discuss proposal to repurpose former Gai-tronics building into a South Campus

Reading, PA— 10/5/2021 — The Berks County Commissioners are considering plans to create a South Campus for County of Berks services, storage and community needs in the former Gai-tronics facility in Mohnton. The new campus would be a long-term, cost-effective option to consolidate several County of Berks services that are currently leasing space at various locations throughout the County and to satisfy the growing need for secure storage and testing of election equipment.

Ken Pick, Executive Director of the Berks County Redevelopment Authority, led a discussion about the potential South Campus during the live Operations Meeting this morning. The Berks County Nonprofit Development Corporation, the nonprofit managed by the Redevelopment Authority, has signed a sales agreement to purchase the property at 400 E. Wyomissing Ave. for about \$5.4 million.

The BCNDC is proposing to lease 100,000 square feet of warehouse and office space in the facility to the County. The proposed agreement would allow the County to lock in at a 30-year fixed cost lease, shielding the County from potential costs increases. The proposed lease also includes \$4 million worth of renovations for County uses. The County would pay for any additional renovation costs as needed. The Commissioners are expected to vote to approve the lease agreement during their Board meeting on Thursday, Oct. 7.

"The Redevelopment Authority and its nonprofit are always ready to assist County government with ideas and projects that reduce costs," Pick said. "This proposal is another example of such a project."

This plan arose during the County's probe to identify a new facility to store election equipment since there is not enough space in the Agriculture Center warehouse for the addition of electronic pollbooks. While looking into both new construction and lease options, county officials

determined that the former Gai-tronics facility would be ideal for the election equipment storage and several other pending needs.

"This is not only a good opportunity to have the space we need for the election equipment, but it also frees up space at the Agriculture Center for the various agencies currently there to expand their services," Commissioner Michael Rivera said.

The proposal would utilize the facility for the following needs and services:

- Election equipment storage and a permanent space for equipment testing, poll worker trainings and mail-in ballot tabulation. The County rented space from the DoubleTree hotel and Santander Arena to process mail-in ballots for the 2020 general election and 2021 elections. The new facility would be outfitted with security and fire suppression equipment.
- Storage of archive records.
- Potential new location for Magisterial District Court 23-2-04. The County and Redevelopment Authority have been working for several years on a plan to find cost-saving alternatives from leasing properties for the various Magisterial District Court system offices.
- A permanent home for the Berks Book Bonanza for donation storage, organization and sales. The annual used book sale for the Friends of Berks County Public Libraries has been at various locations throughout the past years and in need of a new site.

"This provides long-term savings for several county departments while addressing the critical needs for the election equipment storage, testing and poll worker training all in a single location," Commissioners Chair Christian Y. Leinbach said.

The County will also explore the potential to relocate certain functions of the Department of Emergency Services to the site if it meets their technology and equipment needs. If the County is unable to relocate DES to the site, there are other County departments that could be moved from the Downtown Campus.

“The creation of a South Campus would bring several County functions under one roof and better serve our residents,” Commissioner Kevin S. Barnhardt said. “This is a perfect opportunity at a great location with a facility that we can really customize to meet our needs and increase access to County services as we plan for the future.”

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For more information, press only:

Stephanie Weaver, Public Relations Officer

Office: 610-478-6136 x6112

Cell: 610-816-1242

Email: sweaver@countyofberks.com

www.DoYourPartBerks.com www.CountyofBerks.com