

Altmire brings funds to Buffalo

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While at Freeport High School Wednesday to present \$339,014 in federal funding for infrastructure improvements at the intersection, Altmire said he would seek \$350,000 more from the 2010 federal budget.

"I believe in what you're doing here," he told township, Freeport School District and Butler County officials as well as business leaders. "Anything I can do, I will continue to do."

Altmire echoed Buffalo Township Supervisor Dan Przybylek's comments about the business park being a project to spur economic development and keep businesses and jobs in this region.

"We all have a responsibility to create jobs," Przybylek said.

The township business park will house technology-based firms and a business incubator run by Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh.

Tom Emerson, a professor at Carnegie Mellon, described how the park's incubator would generate new businesses.

The university's entrepreneurial class pairs up experts to devise ideas for new businesses. The class assignment often turns into startup businesses.

For example, a 1993 assignment pairing a robotics engineer with a pharmacist led to a robot filling prescriptions an idea

that resulted in the company Automated Healthcare.

Now called McKesson HBOC Automated Healthcare, the company employs 2,000 people.

Emerson said a 2008 assignment turned into ATRP Solutions, which revolutionized new technology for product ingredients.

Modifying molecular structures, ATRP created a new thickening agent for items such as shampoo. Emerson said the new agent is five times more effective than existing ones.

He said ATRP, which has five employees now, would move into the township business park once it's developed.

If secured, the \$350,000 would be used to support the CMU business incubator at the park.

Przybylek said CMU's involvement brings the project to a new level.

"We're trying to identify talent," he said.

Initial development of the park will cover less than half of the 122 acres at the site.

County officials lauded the project as an economic boon for the area. Dave Johnston, director of county planning, agreed with township supervisors' push for commercial development.

"They realized they had to diversify their tax base," he said. "Buffalo Township is a rural community and they want to keep it that way."

Although the project has gotten municipal and federal support, it still needs a developer.

Abeco of Clarion, the original developer tied to the project, previously dropped out.

But Przybylek isn't worried about Abeco's departure. He said the Community Development Corporation of Butler County is looking for a new developer.

The township also is waiting for the school district and county to back tax increment financing for businesses coming to the park.

Under the proposed TIF, the three taxing bodies would receive taxes for the base property value.

Eighty percent of the funds assessed for property taxes would be used for additional infrastructure improvements. The remaining 20 percent would be paid to the taxing bodies.

County Commissioner Dale Pinkerton, board chairman, maintains the county won't participate in a TIF unless the Freeport School District commits to it.

William Reilly, district business manager, said after Altmire's presentation the school board has not discussed the project since Abeco's withdrawal.

The \$339,014 is part of more than \$36 million in federal funds allocation for Western Pennsylvania this year.

Altmire also is pursuing funds for improvements to Route 228.

"We can spur economic growth at every step of the corridor," he said.

Along with economic stimulus and infrastructure improvements, Altmire is focusing on energy reform.

He said Western Pennsylvania is where alternative fuel sources can be developed, so the country would no longer be dependent on foreign oil.