

Still no development plans for Coatesville's Flats

By Tricia L. Nadolny, Inquirer Staff Writer
POSTED: October 15, 2014



The Flats lies near Lincoln Highway and Route 82 in Coatesville. The proposed restoration of rail service to Coatesville in 2017 may aid plans. (ED HILLE/Staff Photographer)

Once eyed for condos and, more recently, a velodrome, the property known as the Flats has been called "the signature" spot for revitalization in Chester County.

Evidently, however, developers aren't convinced.

In July, Coatesville officials sent out a fresh request for development proposals for the property, a vacant tract in the heart of the poorest city in the state's wealthiest county.

It netted not a single bite by the Oct. 1 deadline.

That marks the latest letdown at a site that has been a magnet for plans that never materialize, despite being hailed as being full of potential.

"I expected some type of proposal from someone," said Jack Burkholder, vice chairman of the Redevelopment Authority of Coatesville, which owns the Flats.

The authority bought the 22-acre property when the G.O. Carlson steel plant closed in 2004.

Located about two miles from the Route 30 Bypass and at the gateway to the Coatesville business district, the land is considered vital to the ongoing revitalization of Coatesville, a city with a median household income of about \$37,000.

Over the years, the Flats has been eyed for condominiums, a lumberyard, a power plant, and a park. In 2010, a West Chester man proposed building a velodrome, a cycling center he said could be a breeding ground for Olympic stars.

Officials at the redevelopment authority backed away from that stalled plan in the spring.

At the time, Burkholder and others said recent successes in the city - such as a 125-room Courtyard Marriott that opened in 2012 and a 40,000-square foot office building to be built off the bypass - could bring new excitement to the Flats.

Most alluring to possible developers, he said, is the anticipated 2017 opening of an Amtrak train station, bringing new life to the city's main drag.

But that project hasn't broken ground yet. And this week, Burkholder said developers might need to see it built before considering the Flats.

"They want to see it coming out of the ground before they commit to a project that's going to be related to the success of the train station," he said.

Still no development plants for Coatesville Flats

philly.com, October 15, 2014

page 2

David Sciocchetti of the Chester County Economic Development Council, which coordinated the request for proposals for the Flats, said the site also has challenges that could dissuade a developer. A railroad easement crosses the property. Part of it is in a flood plain, he said.

Sciocchetti said those issues aren't prohibitive, although they might make a developer lean toward another property over the Flats.

He said the larger issue appears to be that developers are busy with projects that stalled during the recession and have recently been reinvigorated.

He said a few developers expressed interest in the Flats and might return to make proposals. One in particular "would be something pretty interesting for Coatesville," he said, declining to elaborate.

He said that in the meantime he's still optimistic.

"We're still looking for the next step in this process. But there will definitely be a next step," he said.

David Chauner, the cyclist who proposed building a velodrome on the Flats, said he still backs the idea. But he's struggled to secure funding and is currently busy building a velodrome in Pittsburgh, he said.

"I still think it's an absolutely great venue," he said. "I think it would be the 'wow factor' that Coatesville needs."

source: philly.com