

Future of old Downingtown train station site unclear

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DOWNTOWN —A new train station in Downingtown leaves the future of the old station in the Johnsontown neighborhood unclear.

PennDOT announced the new Brandywine Avenue location in the middle of the borough for the future train station on Feb. 6.

According Deputy Secretary for Local and Area Transportation Toby Flauver of PennDOT, the entire project is estimated to cost \$30 million.

"We're 18 months to two years from putting shovels in the ground," said Flauver. "After that, there's another year worth of construction."

Flauver also said that in selecting a site for the new station, the department took into consideration possible parking, complicity with Americans with Disability Act, constructability, community, local context and zoning, parking, economic development opportunities, the area's traffic network, and environmental resources.

The River Station Combination, as the proposal is called, combines previous station proposals on the east and west side of Brandywine Avenue, resulting in a total of 95 acres for the railroad and parking.

While pushing for a new stations, Borough Manager Stephen Sullins said that the administration and Borough Council have expressed concerns about the future of the current Johnsontown station.

The existing station was not under consideration as an acceptable site for the new station since it does not comply with the Americans with Disability Act and needs repairs. The renovations of stations along the line are part of a joint federal, state, and local initiative.

"Amtrak has kind of been an absentee landlord when it comes to the site, and we've been struggling with that site for many years," said Sullins.

The station is located in a Keystone Opportunity Zone, areas of the state that are targeted for redevelopment.

"I think it has development potential," said Sullins. "I would hate to pull the train station out of the Johnsontown community and just have some type of blight left over, so what can PennDOT do? I mean, the Borough's not asking for a handout, but we need some assistance with that."

Flauver said that while he and the department understood concerns over the area's future, as of yet, there is no short-term solution.

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Daily Local, February 10, 2013

page 2

"The biggest issue there I think is that Amtrak owns the property and it's a question of value of the property," said Flauver. "It's how they value it and value the community and what the opportunity is there for development."

"There's a lot of discussions happening with our congressional delegation surrounding how we wrestle with these issues now," said Flauver. "It could be an issue that's dealt with the next federal Reauthorization Bill for Transportation, I don't know. I will tell you that we'll work with you as much as we can, with whatever leverage we can to try to address the Amtrak issue."

The new station is part of the Keystone Project and is aimed at faster train travel and station improvements for communities served by the Keystone Line, which serves about 1.4 million riders a year. The project's website, www.planthekeystone.com, has more information.

According to Flauver, stations on the line in Chester County include Parkesburg, Coatesville, Exton, and Paoli. Others are Pittsburgh, Greensburg, Latrobe, Johnstown, Altoona, Tyrone, Huntingdon, Lewistown, Harrisburg, Middletown, Elizabethtown, Mount Joy, Lancaster, Ardmore, and Philadelphia.

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