

Ardmore project faces state funding cut

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The Ardmore Septa Train Station that is part of the revitalization project by developer Carl Dranoff. (MICHAEL BRYANT / Staff Photographer)

ARDMORE Like a railroad car chugging laboriously toward its destination, the downtown Ardmore revitalization and train station project had a big obstacle thrown in its path this week.

The obstacle is \$12 million in funding the state said it will cut.

Lower Merion Township officials received a letter Monday that says Gov. Corbett plans to reduce a pledged \$15.5 million grant from the state's Redevelopment Assistance Capital Program to \$3.5 million. The grant is for the project to revitalize the Ardmore station and build a residential and commercial development nearby.

The letter, dated Dec. 12, was written by Pete Tartline, deputy executive secretary of the state Office of the Budget.

On Wednesday, township and county officials, along with State Rep. Tim Briggs (D., Montgomery) and developer Carl Dranoff, were scrambling to figure out how to get the funding restored.

"We're very disappointed in what's happening, and we're developing a plan for how to deal with it, how to recover this money," township spokesman Thomas J. Walsh said.

"I'm not yet willing to concede it's been cut," said Montgomery County Commissioners Chairman Josh Shapiro, adding that regional officials on Wednesday requested a meeting with the state to discuss the funding.

Seen as a way to economically boost Ardmore's main commercial area, the project has been years in the studying and planning, and has not broken ground. Both SEPTA and Amtrak use the station.

The state authorized the \$15.5 million in 2008, according to the letter - though the money cannot be released until construction begins.

"From late 2008 through 2013, the project scope changed several times," the letter said.

No one disputes that changes have occurred.

Initially, the mixed-use development was going to be built on two parking lots next to the station, said Angela Murray, the township's assistant director for community and economic development.

When those lots were deemed too small, that piece of the Ardmore revitalization project migrated a block away and across Lancaster Avenue to a public parking lot on Cricket Avenue. Still, a residential development was part of the plan even when the state approved the grant, Murray said.

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According to the letter, the residential development component is "outside of RACP's scope." That, along with "the fact that the project continues to be conceptual, and the demand for funding from competing proposed RACP projects," led Corbett to reauthorize the release of only \$3.5 million of the redevelopment funding, Tartline wrote.

Shapiro said state officials seem not to understand how much progress the project has made.

"I'm disappointed in what the letter seems to say. There's a clear lack of understanding at Department of Community and Economic Development about this project," he said.

Dranoff could not be reached for comment.

source: philly.com