

# **PEDA Exec Developing A Vision**

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PITTSFIELD -- There are papers stacked on Cory Thurston's desk at the Pittsfield Economic Development Authority's headquarters on Kellogg Street, but the piles are not overwhelming.

"I like to get things done," said Thurston, who, in April, became the first person from outside the organization to become PEDA's executive director in the agency's 13-year history.

"My desk has a few things piled here," he added, "But I'd like to think they'll be gone and there will be a new pile next week."

All indications are that Thurston is living up to those words.

Since assuming the position full-time when interim executive director William M. Hines Sr. retired at the end of April, Thurston this month oversaw the groundbreaking for the William Stanley Business Park's first real tenant, the MountainOne Financial Center. A quasi-public agency, PEDA is responsible for the development of the 52-acre park, which is located on the site of General Electric's former power transformer facility.

Granted, most of the work with MountainOne occurred before Thurston arrived on the scene. But in the last three months, Thurston has helped PEDA secure a letter of interest from a possible new client and has been finalizing the transfer of the park's final 19 acres from GE to PEDA, which is now expected to be completed by the end of the year.

He has also been in contact with state and local officials regarding the redevelopment of the Woodlawn Avenue railroad bridge and the building of an incubator building for small businesses on the site, while exploring a possible expansion of the business park's territory. Under the terms of the consent decree that requires GE to clean up PCB contamination in Pittsfield, the corporate giant is required to clean each piece of land of pollution before it can turn the parcels over to PEDA. The complexity of that process -- everything has to be approved by multiple agencies before the land transfers occur -- is one reason why the development of the Stanley Business Park has taken so long. Some of the issues Thurston is currently working on have been dealt with by PEDA for years. But those who work with him are impressed with how he has tried to tackle so much in so little time.

"He's a go-getter," said Gary Grunin, PEDA's current board chairman. "I'm really

happy with him. He really hit the ground running."

Thurston, 58, who lives in Williamstown, is the son of the late Donald A. Thurston, who founded the Berkshire Broadcasting Co. before coming to PEDA. Thurston had never held a position that was specifically focused on economic development. But he had previous experience in land acquisition, sales, marketing and communications, working for both his father's company and as an acquisition specialist and project manager for Redstone Properties of Williamstown.

"It's been a learning experience," Thurston said. "I purposely jumped in and tried to learn as much as I could about the last 12 years, really for the lessons that history can teach so that we don't repeat the problems that have occurred.

"I'm not an environmental wizard, and I'm not a lawyer, and those are the two biggest pieces of the PEDA agreement (with GE) in terms of its conceptual parts," he said. "However, I do know my way around a bit, and I have a lot of experience, so it's not totally foreign to me.

"I've really been pushing to get some of these pieces moving at a faster pace through the channels," he said.

Thurston said his biggest concern has been the redevelopment of the Woodlawn Avenue railroad bridge, which is owned by the CSX railroad and is located on a parcel of land that is still under GE's control. The center span has to be replaced so CSX can run double-stack containers from its base in Selkirk, N.Y., through to Worcester. At Pittsfield's two other CSX railroad bridges, on First and North streets, Thurston said the company plans to lower the track bed so that the higher cars can pass through safely. That option is unavailable for the Woodlawn Avenue span because it is located in an environmentally sensitive area, Thurston said. Replacement of the center span is expected to cost between \$2 and \$3 million.

"All we're off is about 15 inches," he said.

According to Thurston, GE has granted CSX permission to replace the span, but the state can't provide funding to the company for its removal because the bridge is owned by a private entity. The bridge has to come under PEDA's jurisdiction before the transfer of funds can take place. He hopes the span can be replaced next winter.

"I have had meetings with state Department of Transportation officials and District 1 engineer Peter Niles," Thurston said. "They have promised me that as soon as it is in PEDA's hands, I will get on the bid list for the replacement of the bridge or the reconstruction so I can put it back into service."