

PEDA officials take step toward securing \$6.5 million for life sciences

incubator

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Posted:

BerkshireEagle.com

Executive Director Cory Thurston said PEDA is "focused" on obtaining a portion of that state earmark -- enough to plan the project -- from the Massachusetts Life Sciences Center by next month, so that the quasi-public agency could eventually convince the state to release the entire amount.

In 2008, the Legislature approved the funding for the building at the Stanley Business Park, but for a variety of reasons, PEDA has never received any of the money.

At PEDA's monthly meeting on Wednesday, Thurston said receiving the entire \$6.5 million allocation is a "step-by-step" process that has no formal application process. But obtaining planning funds would enable PEDA to lay the groundwork for obtaining the entire earmark, and let the MLSC know that "this project is real," he said.

"I don't believe that by any stretch of the imagination that we're ready for the total pitch," Thurston said. "You have to take baby steps to get to the ultimate goal."

PEDA is in charge of developing the 52-acre Stanley Business Park located on reclaimed GE factory land between East and Kellogg streets. By establishing a building for young businesses in the life sciences industry to grow, PEDA could position the business park to tie into the life sciences industry economy locally and statewide.

Last March, Mayor Daniel L. Bianchi, a PEDA board member, called on the board to submit a "competitive-type proposal" with the Massachusetts Life Sciences Center and move the project forward. The Massachusetts Life Sciences Center is implementing the state's 10-year, \$1 billion economic development plan to build the public and private in life sciences research and development.

Bianchi said he has been putting together a life sciences task force to form synergies with Berkshire County firms and institutions involved in the life sciences. As examples, Bianchi cited Berkshire Health Systems, which is co-sponsoring the construction of a \$30 million cancer center in Pittsfield; the Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts in North Adams, which plans to open its \$30 million Center for Science and Innovation in the fall; and a local engineering firm that manufactures implants for the medical industry.

In November, Nuclea Biotechnologies of Pittsfield formed a partnership with PEDA to establish a bioinformatics and imaging center inside the organization's administration building on Kellogg Street.

"We want to show [the Massachusetts Life Sciences Center] that we've done things, and have laid a good foundation," Bianchi said.

Board members also discussed trying to obtain a portion of the \$308,000 in capital funding that the MLSC set aside in October to conduct a formal study of life sciences related economic development in Western Massachusetts at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst.

Bianchi also suggested that PEDA should try to establish links with agricultural-type functions at UMass-Amherst, similar to the master's degree program in historic preservation that the state university has established at Hancock Shaker Village.

Board members also expressed an interest in becoming involved in GlobalFoundries plan to build a new research and development facility across the state line in Malta, N.Y. that is expected to create 1,000 jobs.

"But it has to start with a commitment for the life sciences project," said George Whalen. "We have to build the building, then we can start to market to those folks."

Acting Chairman Mick Callahan said PEDA's interest in GlobalFoundries' operations would probably be focused on

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companies that supply materials to the semiconductor manufacturer.

"The vendor network to those companies is probably our best bet," he said.