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Concord Township focuses on comprehensive plan

By Simon Husted, The News-Herald

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Concord Township is working to replace its nearly 10-year-old comprehensive plan next year with one focused on economic development, and its next step in that process is hiring a firm and appointing a steering committee to lead the project.

Concord Township trustees began reviewing proposals from five firms at Monday's special township trustee meeting. Those proposals were collected between Nov. 6 and Dec. 6, and trustees are expected to approve one of the proposals at their organizational meeting at 9:30 a.m. Jan. 2 at Town Hall. Members of the comprehensive plan's steering committee also will be appointed at that meeting.

Concord Township Zoning Inspector Kathy Mitchell said the firms range in price from \$34,000 to \$54,000 and include Norstar Planning and Design, OHM Advisors, Poggemeyer Design Group, Environmental Design Group and Mackin Engineering.

Mitchell said whichever one is selected will do more than simply write and lay out the township's final draft. "(The firm) will also be guiding the steering committee through monthly meetings," Mitchell said. "It will be around a yearlong process. They will also be updating our existing conditions and our demographic information for us."

The township plans to schedule two public forums to gather input for the plan. Those have yet to be scheduled. Local governments often use comprehensive plans to steer zoning and planning decisions and are sometimes used to defend those decisions in court, local officials said.

"A comprehensive plan is not a set of regulations; it is a set of recommended policies and goals," Mitchell said. "It sets up implementation strategies to help us make some changes."

The township's last comprehensive plan was adopted in November 2004.

Trustee Chris Galloway was on the Citizen's Advisory Committee to the plan.

He said that comprehensive plan was focused on ending "battles" over residential zoning and development.

Those battles have ended since taking office with Trustee Paul Malchesky in 2006, he said, and now the focus has been switched to commercial development.

The new plan specifically emphasizes the Auburn-Crile Business Corridor along Route 44.

That area is home to almost all of Concord's businesses and includes the Concord-Painesville Economic Development District.

The area also is slated to go through a \$12 million road project to improve safety conditions in the area beginning summer 2015.

The plan is slated to consider items in the business corridor's 2006 study such as a Planned Village Development Overlay District and models for a town center.

Galloway said the last comprehensive plan process took too long and he expects this upcoming one to take half the number of months.

"I'm not kidding you, it had to be 18 months," Galloway said.

"We're making sure we're doing this one with laser focus."

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