



City grants SACA \$200,000 for River Plaza planning

Lancaster's Spanish American Civic Association (SACA) was granted a \$200,000 boost from the City for their proposed Conestoga River Plaza on a 5.7 acre riverside tract near the intersection of Chesapeake and South Duke St., adjoining the Lancaster County Park.

The grant will be used towards a six-month design and engineering phase for the commercial, residential, and environmental aspects of the prospective project.

Carlos Graupera, SACA's Executive Director, expressed to the Council that this planning phase would aim to gather good ideas and reject unfeasible ones: *"It will try to rule out all those things that will not work—that are not feasible—in the vision."* Graupera also mentioned that the development process will involve an opportunity

for neighborhood residents to share their ideas and concerns for the project.

The site, upon which presently stands the abandoned Miguel's Nightclub, was once used as a landfill and an auto-parts dump; however, Graupera indicated that early analysis has shown that the site should be safe for development.

The Conestoga River Plaza proposes to include a bank, a community grocery store, retail stores, a full service restaurant, gallery and performance space, and townhouses along the river.

More information about SACA's plan for the Conestoga River Plaza can be found at <http://sacapa.org/econDev.html>

Library System head criticizes Commissioners

In a letter to The League of Women Voters, Susan Hauer, Administrator, Library System of Lancaster County, discloses:

"The 2006 per capita expenditure for library services from County funding is the lowest of the surrounding Counties. Lancaster/\$4.89; York/\$5.66; Berks/\$8.08; Bucks/\$8.67; Adams/\$10.35; Cumberland/\$13.40; Chester/\$14.33; Dauphin/\$15.72."

She describes how *"The media has been filled recently with stories of increased library customers and funding cuts from all levels of government and private donors."*

Hauer then challenges the mind set of the current Board of County Commissioners by claiming that *"...they have no mandate to support library services in the County. That is*

untrue due to a 1997 County Resolution and unfair to a democratic society that demands free public library services in return for their hard earned taxes. "

Hauer requests that "the League continue to follow and support the Library System and member Libraries in our efforts to attract appropriate funding for Library Services in Lancaster County" and "encourage candidates who are seeking public office to include appropriate funding for libraries as part of their platform."

That 1300 people flock to the Duke Street library daily shows that Lancastrians aren't backwards. That the county and most municipalities fail to properly fund libraries speaks to the mind set of our elected officials.

Lancaster Catholic progresses to Regional Mock Trial Finals

Lancaster Catholic defeated York Catholic on Tuesday in what a local observer described as a "*clear victory*." Strong on arguments, York faltered on technicalities, failed to object even once, and stumbled over cross examination of a witness.

Lancaster Catholic, which squeaked by McCaskey on a split decision for the county championship, now moves on to the Regional Finals on March 18th in Harrisburg. If they win, they proceed to the statewide competition.

Convention Center Revenue: A Guessing Game

Courtesy of <http://www.lookingatlancaster.blogspot.com/>

One of the first "pro-forma" projections available was in a presentation to the Lancaster County Convention Center Authority board on February 22, 2006. The projection of first full-year revenue was estimated to be **\$1,272,799**.

The only estimate of convention center revenue to be widely distributed was published in the Lancaster New Era on Thursday, June 14, 2007, page A4. It projected the first full year of operation would generate **\$1,577,000** in gross revenue.

The first revenue projection available to the public from Interstate Hotels and Resorts (IHR), the joint manager of both the hotel and convention center, was created on November 6, 2007. At this point, IHR was using a "stub" year for 2009, from the opening of the convention center until the end of the calendar year; this estimate was \$971,636 for nine months - roughly in line with the February 2006 projection.

Late in 2008, IHR switched to a fiscal year, to align their operational budget with the long-established fiscal year used by the LCCCA. .. But as of November of 2008, the anticipated first year's gross income was down to **\$957,840**.

At the LCCCA Public Relations, Marketing & Hospitality Committee meeting held on

Thursday, February 19, 2009, IHR presented its latest estimates of operational income for the convention center. At that time, the total projected revenue of the first full year of operation for the convention center was down to **\$514,935**, or less than a third of the amount published in the local newspapers in June of 2007 (only twenty months earlier).

___... the total amount of revenue contracted to date is estimated to be only **\$235,886**, or only 15% of the amount published in the newspaper during June of 2007...

To make matters worse for the LCCCA, market rates have at times been outside of the range allotted in the construction bond sale's interest rate "swap". This has already cost the LCCCA tens of thousands of dollars beyond its budget for bond payments.

What does this mean for Lancaster County taxpayers? It is entirely possible that the LCCCA will not collect enough money from the "hotel tax" and convention center revenue combined to cover its bond payments and operational costs. This means that a tax increase of some kind will be inevitable, whether in the "hotel tax" (which is limited by State law) or in Lancaster County property taxes, perhaps as soon as next year (2010).

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