

Greensburg Laurels & Lances

Friday, March 7, 2008

Lance: To Westmoreland County Courthouse's space cadets. Supposedly, there's no room at the courthouse to store deeds and mortgage records. And the news media, long afforded space, have been given the bum's rush. But there's space enough for county employees' aerobics classes.

And while those workers get their own workout space in empty third-floor offices, Westmoreland Democrat commissioners have agreed to pay more than \$45,000 -- *a year* -- for five years to lease private space to store those aforementioned records. But don't sweat the cost, we're told; it will be paid by filing fees for mortgages and deeds. What's evidenced, besides this sorry excuse for space management, is a flagrant disregard for public agencies and individuals who are going to get smacked by these fees.

Lance: To bypassing the taxpayers' interest. It's official: The long-deliberated, hardly facilitated Route 711 bypass around Ligonier Borough is dead. This was an excruciatingly slow, expensive death that took about 16 years and who knows how many millions of dollars in studies and plans for all those alternative routes. Yet through it all there was never a clear public consensus, let alone a mandate, for a project that would have cost, by one estimate, up to \$20 million.

Laurel: To North Huntingdon commissioners. They're fed up, and rightfully so, with the festering eyesore that is the shuttered Carlton Motel. And this, at an entry point to the township. The owner, Gary P. Monsour, formerly of North Huntingdon and now living in Loxahatchee, Fla., has been cited for allowing debris to pile up; other code violations at the abandoned motel date back more than five years. It's high time this dumping ground is cleaned up.

On the "Watch List": Route 30's master plan. It's been a long road for Westmoreland's Smart Growth Partnership. What a pity it would be if the plan, expected to be finalized in May, dies a quiet death in municipal offices. Our concern all along has been the increasing traffic along this primary east-west corridor. And with acres of undeveloped land along the thoroughfare -- most notably in Unity Township -- the continuation of scattershot, ill-planned development could turn today's minor traffic headaches into nightmares.

An observation: A 3 percent hotel-occupancy tax is all but a done deal in Fayette County -- one of the last counties in the area to adopt the levy. It's easy money for tourism, backers say. But inevitably the tax will be increased. And occasional visitors -- who enjoy the area's affordability as compared with pricier destinations -- are not likely to return if they get broadsided by unexpectedly high hotel room taxes. Be careful what you wish for.