

# Rendell to work on Laurelton Center sale

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MIFFLINBURG — There is no “earth-shattering” news to report on the situation at the Laurelton Center, but progress regarding the sale of the site is occurring, according to Rep. Russ Fairchild (R-85).

Fairchild gave a brief update on the status of the Laurelton Center at the monthly meeting of the Greater Susquehanna Valley Chamber of Commerce (GSVCC), held Thursday morning at the Carriage Corner Restaurant, Mifflinburg.

Fairchild said he and other government and local officials met with Gov. Ed Rendell on Aug. 12 and made sure he knew about the Laurelton Center situation.

“He took notes,” said Fairchild. “He said he would handle the situation personally.”

Since it’s closing, the Department of General Services (DGS) has been looking for a new tenant. Most recently, the state entered into a contract with Woodward Camp, an action sports camp that trains kids in skateboarding, gymnastics, biking, inline skating and more. Woodward hoped to expand into Laurelton this year, but in April realized that wasn’t going



Rep. Russ Fairchild (R-85)

to happen. It asked the state for a six-month extension on closing on the property. The state offered a two-month extension. Woodward declined and the deal fell through.

Woodward owner and operator Gary Ream said there were issues that needed to be resolved regarding potential underground contamination at Laurelton. DGS officials said the problem had been resolved.

“I think they (Woodward) were justified in asking for an extension,” said Fairchild. “When it comes to underground contamination at the site ... they had to further investigate.”

## Rendell

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Fairchild added “Something like that sends up red flags to the banking community.”

So far, he said, the state has taken a “wait and see” attitude. He said Rendell expressed an interest in the situation but he hasn’t heard back from him since the August meeting.

“These things take time,” he said. “He’s got his hands full but that doesn’t mean we can’t continue to move things along.”

After speaking to someone from the governor’s office on Wednesday, Fairchild said he was told the Department of Environmental Protection will complete its testing of the site within the next two weeks.

“They wanted to make sure there were no additional problems,” he said.

“Once DEP issues a report, hopefully we’ll have the go ahead,” he said.

Fairchild said he hopes to have some news in the next two to four weeks.

The Laurelton Center, located in western Union County, consists of 335 acres of land and 52 buildings. It had been used as a home for the mentally retarded and was closed in June 1998 following 77 years as a state-run institution.

Woodward Camp entered into the agreement to purchase the former Laurelton Center, which includes 27 stone buildings, in February 2002 and received the paperwork from the state Nov. 1, 2002. It planned to turn the center into a college-like campus devoted to action sports with a 17,000-square-foot indoor skate park; wooded BMX dirt jumping trails; real street riding on the streets of Laurelton with custom designed obstacles and street spots; swimming pool; 1,200-seat auditorium; full-size basketball court in a lofted gymnasium; and a dining hall. It planned to lease land for a golf course that would wrap around the property.

Plans were to connect the Woodward Camp and Woodward Laurelton Campus by a themed DTR (Down The Road) bus shuttle system for equal access to both locations and all facilities.

Since the Laurelton Center went on the market in 1998, the state has accepted two other agreements. Hampton Laurelton was the first. The Allentown firm won the contract to develop the center into a senior citizen resident/retirement community, but it failed to meet contract deadlines set by the state.

Then the state agreed to sell the buildings and grounds to a group of local developers, Hickernell Springs, which wanted to turn the place into a golf resort and conference center. It was unable to secure the necessary funds and the deal fell through again.

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