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Route 611 to get more development

By **ANNIE TASKER**
The Intelligencer

The grassy expanse at Easton and Paul Valley roads is one of the last undeveloped plots along Warrington's Route 611 corridor.

That might not be the case for long.

Plans are in the works to build on up to 70 acres of that land with more than 260,000 square feet of retail space, restaurants, housing, a gas station and a hotel.

Plans for the so-called Paul Valley Town Center show retail buildings ranging from about 14,500 to 105,000 square feet. Also proposed are two 200-seat restaurants, an 80-room hotel and 80 residential units, with an alternative plan for a 120-unit assisted-living facility.

An agreement of sale is in place for the property known more commonly in Warrington as the Penrose tract, said Thomas Porsch of central Pennsylvania-based Caldwell Development Co.

Porsch said he is not at liberty to say which businesses might move into the Paul Valley Town Center, since the company is in talks with several retailers. Rumor has it that a supermarket is planned, but Porsch would not confirm that Caldwell Developers was considering a grocery store.

Caldwell Development's past retail-residential projects have been anchored by Giant, JCPenney, PNC Bank and Home Depot, according to its Web site.

The proposed center is part of wave of development along Route 611 in Warrington, following the sprawling Valley Square shopping center that opened late last year. A Harleysville National Bank and an as-yet-unnamed restaurant are planned across the street from the Penrose Tract.

The Bucks County Planning Commission reviewed plans for Paul Valley Town Center in early February and pointed out that proposed use for this land is at odds with the goals Warrington set for Penrose Tract development in 2006.

"The plan ... does not provide an attractive 'gateway' to Warrington and Bucks County and duplicates many uses (i.e., big-box retail, age restricted housing) already found elsewhere in the township," the county notes said.

Plans went before the Warrington planning commission March 20.

Warrington supervisor Rebecca Kiefer, who had yet not seen them, said she once hoped the Penrose Tract could become something conservative, such as a university medical campus with walking trails and nature areas.

"I definitely don't want more big-box retail," she said.

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WHERE THE HELL IS MY PHILLY EDGE



For the man whose historic land is now yielding to more modern design, this agreement of sale was a long time coming.

Joseph Penrose has received an offer or two each month to buy the property over the past 15 years, said his real-estate agent and distant cousin Penrose Hallowell. Years ago, he sold part of it to the people who built the Target and surrounding shops next door.

"It's a hard choice," Hallowell said. "He's saved it that long. He could have sold it any number of times before. Now, it's time to sell."

Hallowell knows the challenge firsthand. The farmer and Bucks County Farmland Preservation Board member resigned from his chairman position in 2005 after he came under fire for selling part of his Tinicum farmland to developers who wanted to build a sewage treatment plant.

"The profitability of farming in Bucks County is real difficult," he said.

Hallowell would not comment on the potential sale price. A Doylestown real-estate broker, when asked what the Penrose property might be worth, said, "You're looking at an incredible price tag on that."

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Penrose is working with Caldwell and the township to preserve the old farmhouse on the property, and the development plan now in the works includes some streams and trails.

"It'll be more than just a development," Hallowell said. "It will serve citizens in some way."

Porsch said Caldwell Development expects to finalize its plans within the next two to three months.

March 30, 2008 8:20 AM

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