

Council OKs funding for call center

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By Christopher Sardelli

County Council unanimously approved funding Monday for a call center training program that could attract call centers to the county.

Keith Tunnell, president of the Lancaster County Economic Development Corp., and Ernie Green, dean of Off Campus Centers for York Technical College, appeared before council Monday to request \$75,000 in funding from the county. The proposed workforce readiness training program would prepare area residents for jobs in the call center industry.

With a task force that includes representatives from the Workforce Investment Act, York Technical College and local businesses, Tunnell has been looking for ways to fund the training program and facility. The WIA Board recently voted on its proposed budget and funded \$300,000 for the program. A portion of this money comes from stimulus funds approved by the S.C. Department of Commerce for use in supporting job training.

"I'm pleased to report that the WIA did approve funding," Tunnell said. "More is available if the center is considered successful. Now we need council to approve \$75,000 in funding."

Councilman Jack Estridge made a motion to approve the funding, which was seconded by Councilman Larry Honeycutt. The motion was passed unanimously by a vote of 6-0. Vice-chairman Rudy Carter was absent.

"I think it's a major milestone for us. We're doing good, good stuff," said Councilman Larry McCullough. "I would like the first class of graduates to come see us at council when they're done. They're the pioneers."

Tunnell said the training will take place in the former Thaxton building, a two-story, 13,000-square-foot facility on the S.C. 9 Bypass.

The economic development corporation is working to secure a six-month lease on the building. York Tech is developing the training program.

There will also be space for the WIA, as well additional space for future classes and training if needed. Green said he hopes to get the first class started by mid-July or early August.

"We want call center training to get done as soon as possible," Tunnel said.

The economic development corporation has identified a large candidate pool for training in Lancaster County – all of whom are Workforce Investment Act certified.

These are people who have lost their jobs due to layoffs or closures. Tunnell said there are about 700 WIA-certified people in the county.

All these people could be trained within one year, he said.

The program's curriculum will include courses explaining the mechanics of a call center, the essentials of customer service and database training.

As for when an actual call center may set up shop in Lancaster County, Tunnell said he has been speaking with an interested company. Discussions are still tentative as the company searches for whom it will provide third-party services.

"We're still working with the company and they have a strong interest in Lancaster County," Tunnell said. "They're awaiting a contract and I'm optimistic that once they have one in hand they'll look favorably on Lancaster County."

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