

Civic partnership approves group as subcommittee

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A committee that intends to raise money to enhance area law enforcement is now a member of the Greater Hazleton Area Civic Partnership.

A Safer Hazleton, which was formed about a year ago, was granted its request to become a subcommittee of the partnership so the committee can take advantage of the partnership's 501(c)3 nonprofit status.

The tax designation is needed for organizations to obtain government grants and to accept donations from individuals and businesses which can use the donation as a deduction on federal income taxes.

The unanimous vote came after about an hour of discussion.

Partnership members had some concerns, but those representing A Safer Hazleton - Hazleton Mayor Joe Yannuzzi and acting City Administrator Mary Ellen Lieb - had the answers the partnership was looking for.

Donna Palermo, president of the Greater Hazleton Chamber of Commerce, the partnership's parent organization, said the main concern was that any grants the committee would be successful in obtaining would not hinder the partnership's ability to get grants from the same sources. The partnership has been having financial problems for the last few years, but was successful in getting a \$12,000 grant from the First Federal Foundation.

But Palermo, who also is the partnership's chairwoman, said Tony Cusatis, president of the First Federal Foundation, "assured us very favorably upon this type of partnership."

Bob Skulsky, the partnership's executive director, said he had a similar discussion - with similar results - with Charles Barber, president of the Luzerne Foundation.

"They will look at each organization as a separate entity, even though they are under the partnership," Skulsky said

"We've taken on other committees that later left the partnership," Skulsky said. "Community assessment did its job, and went away. The Volunteer Center started under the partnership, and then went on its own."

Yannuzzi said the same is planned for A Safer Hazleton.

"This isn't forever," he said of the involvement with the partnership.

A Safer Hazleton is being modeled after Operation Our Town, a committee formed in Blair County to assist police in Altoona that has helped cut crime in that city.

Yannuzzi and Lieb said A Safer Hazleton, like the Blair County group, will seek private funds that can be used to leverage other funds, like grants.

Palermo noted that for any grants over \$500, the partnership will require 10 percent for administrative

expenses.

But Lena Kotansky, the city's economic development officer, said grants are not easy to come by.

"Economic conditions have changed, and grants are not the same as they were five, or even three years ago," she said.

"But they (the government) want to know if you have any donated money committed to a project before making any grants."

Yannuzzi and Lieb also assured partnership members they will see that A Safer Hazleton's administrative duties are not left to Skulsky, who Palermo said is too busy now.

"We're happy to do it," Palermo said after the vote. "It really is the mission of the civic partnership to do this."

Lieb said A Safer Hazleton initially was formed to try to get a grant to purchase outdoor surveillance cameras for the downtown. However, the group was not successful in getting the grant, and became dormant.

Now that the committee is under the umbrella of the civic partnership, Lieb said it has to reorganize.

"We need (people) who will be passionate about this, and have the time to devote to it," Lieb said. "The people in the Crime Watch programs want to be involved. Those are the kind of people we need. What I see is subcommittees being set up, maybe one for the cameras, and one to approach the business community, and maybe one to develop programs about drugs and gang violence."

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