

## **County seeks to secure funds**

### **Commissioners hire firm to help procure stimulus money**

Jeff Tucker  
Staff writer

In an effort to procure federal stimulus money, the Shelby County Board of Commissioners hired a consulting firm Monday night to guide the commissioners through the red tape.

The contract was conditionally approved on the consulting firm providing its full report to the commissioners in 30 days.

"I know we've got to act quick with this stimulus money," said Commissioner Kevin Nigh.

The MEK Group will investigate whether Shelby County should join either an Indianapolis-based or Southeast Indiana regional planning commission. A regional planning commission can provide the county the expertise on applying for federal and other grants, said Commissioners President Tony Newton.

"We don't have the expertise to know what we're going to look for," Newton said.

Newton said MEK's \$1,500 fee is "very reasonable," adding it is necessary for Shelby County to join a regional planning commission if the county wants "future grants, stimulus money or anything else."

The county commissioners are considering two options: joining either the Southeastern Indiana Regional Planning Commission or The Metropolitan Development Commission of Marion County.

The Southeastern Indiana Regional Planning Commission based in Versailles is a community and economic development agency that serves Dearborn, Decatur, Franklin, Jefferson, Jennings, Ohio, Ripley and Switzerland counties. It has a board of directors appointed by local elected officials that includes elected leaders, business and development professionals and interested citizens.

The Metropolitan Development Commission of Marion County is based in Indianapolis and provides similar expertise for land use, transportation and neighborhood planning. Moral Township in Shelby County already belongs to the group.

"All this stimulus money is going through (metropolitan planning organizations), all of it," Newton said.

Newton said joining an Indianapolis-based regional planning commission could put Shelby County in competition with more populated counties, such as Hamilton County.

Joining the southeastern planning commission would perhaps make Shelby County "a bigger player with the casino and everything else in our location," he said.

"I think our main thing was do we want to compete with Hamilton County and that stuff and fight it out with larger counties or be a bigger fish and go with the southeast?" Newton said. "I think we're on a more level playing field with counties our size."

Nigh said they had no preference on which regional planning commission to join.

"Whatever benefits Shelby County the most," Nigh said.

"I'd rather be a part of that southeast group," said Commissioner David Mohr.

Indiana stands to receive about \$4 billion from the federal stimulus package signed into law Feb. 17 by President Barack Obama.

Gov. Mitch Daniels wants American Recovery and Reinvestment Act money to go toward one-time projects that put people to work, can start quickly and will leave the state with lasting assets.

Daniels has appointed Lt. Gov. Becky Skillman to oversee state agencies' use of stimulus cash. She is charged with making sure the projects create jobs, move fast and leave lasting assets.

The Indiana Department of Transportation has identified about \$44 million in road and bridge projects that would be ready to begin once Indiana receives its federal stimulus money. INDOT's priorities are speed, having projects that represent a variety of highway work all around the state, and creating jobs for Hoosiers.

INDOT said Indiana will receive \$658 million in highway funds. The funds will be distributed with \$440,838,364 going to state projects, \$19,739,031 going for transportation enhancement projects. In addition, INDOT has allocated \$84,898,430 for large metropolitan planning organizations, \$26,347,789 for smaller metropolitan planning organizations, and \$86,144,093 for cities, counties and towns with populations under 200,000 which are not part of an MPO.

"There's a large amount of dollars there on that stimulus and the rules are changing all the time and we just need help," Nigh said. "We just want to explore every avenue to make sure we're doing everything to get the most for Shelby County."