RAD BOARD PASSES LARGEST BUDGET IN RAD HISTORY

On November 27, the Allegheny Regional Asset District Board approved a 2007 Grant Budget that will fund 111 operating and capital grants totaling $78.2 million to 87 assets. The budget is the largest in the District’s thirteen-year history, in both dollar amount and number of assets recommended for funding. The budget is $3.6 million or 4.8% higher than the District’s 2006 budget.

The final budget is $1.2 million higher than the preliminary plan released in October. Each of the nine contractual assets will now receive a 2% operating grant increase. In addition to $74.4 million in operating grants, the budget calls for $2.3 million in capital grants. The $2.3 million in capital grants slated for contractual assets includes funds for a number of improvements to regional parks including winter recreation facility repairs, restroom and ball field construction, pathway repairs at the Pittsburgh Zoo, electrical system repairs at Phipps Conservatory, and glass and deck renovations at the National Aviary.

Discretionary Capital Grants in 2007

Some $800,000 in discretionary capital grants for annual assets was adopted for projects ranging from accessibility enhancements to vital facility repairs and equipment replacement. Several grants will help assets to match or complete challenge grants.

The RAD Allocations Committee, responsible for recommending the budget, noted that the ability to provide modest increases to contractual assets and additional capital grants was a result of responding to growth in revenue with increased investments. (The county sales tax, the source of District revenue, exceeded budget in the first 11 months of 2006.)

A number of first time grantees are funded in the budget including a $2 million grant for the operation of the David Lawrence Convention Center. This grant was submitted as a short term request until permanent funding for the Center is secured. A scheduled decrease of $1.4 million in a debt service grant for the Mellon Arena will offset a significant portion of this new convention center funding, according to the Allocations Committee. The Board funded six other new assets to recognize the Board’s interest in quality organizations that appeal to a broad spectrum of interests, particularly young adults.

Library service remains the largest single category of District support at 32% of the budget. The increase in support for library service from 2006 to 2007 totals $632,500.

Parks, trails and other green space projects will receive 28%. Support for the stadiums and the arena is 18% of the budget. Regional facilities (Pittsburgh Zoo, Phipps Conservatory, National Aviary and Convention Center) receive 11%, and arts and culture programs and facilities receive 10% of the funds.

The growth in sales tax this year means that the District will fund all of its 2006 obligations from current revenue. The revised numbers were used by the District’s Allocation Committee as they prepared the final budget story (see companion article above). Monthly financial reports are posted on the RAD web site, www.radworkshere.org.

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The release of the preliminary budget follows a year-long process that involved site visits, analysis of 103 eligible applications, 15 hours of public review sessions and a public hearing. Additional information is available by calling the District office or visiting the District’s web page at radworkshere.org.

“RADical Days 2006” Celebrates Assets

More than 35,000 visitors experienced “RADical Days 2006,” with free admission at 30 asset sites, performances offered by 15 assets, and special programming at 25 county libraries. “RADical Days” is an annual RAD-sponsored event that is a fun way for the assets to thank the public for its support of the RAD program. If you would like to be on the email list for notification about RADical Days 2007, please email RAD Communications Manager Julie Goetz at jg@radworkshere.org.

TAX REVENUE UPDATE

Sales tax revenue received by the District for eleven months of 2006 totaled $71.5 million, compared to $69.6 million received for the same period last year. Assuming a normal December return, year end tax revenue is estimated to be about $76.5 million or about 1.6% greater than 2005. An equal amount of funds was received by Allegheny County and the municipalities for use to reduce property taxes and fund municipal services.

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NEW PLACES AND SPACES
AT YOUR REGIONAL ASSETS

Every day, our regional assets, with the support of their boards and staff, work to improve the quality of life in this area. Some months are particularly notable for the number of special projects that are unveiled, with use of RAD funds. In just the last few weeks, asset partners have (clockwise from top): opened a significantly improved walking/running track (Schenley Park) and a new regional 3B (aka bike/board/blade) action park (Boyce Park); dedicated a modern new neighborhood branch library (Woods Run); broken ground for a new multi-cultural arts facility (August Wilson African American Cultural Center); have made a home for twin polar bear brothers (Pittsburgh Zoo & PPG Aquarium); and have raised a new steeple at the Chapel Shelter in Riverview Park (not pictured). Coming soon, look for the new Tropical Forest at Phipps Conservatory and Botanical Gardens.