

Murphy prods 'East Shore' leaders

Ex-mayor pushes for development

By Rich Lord
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Leaders of four boroughs that are aiming for a new look and yearning for a big development heard a clear call for boldness Thursday evening from a former Pittsburgh mayor.

"Kick the door down," Tom Murphy told political and business leaders from Swissvale, Rankin, Braddock and North Braddock at an event hosted by the Enterprise Zone Corporation of Braddock.

He said Pittsburgh could have accepted its decline in the 1990s, but he found ways to finance a new vision.

"Don't tell me you don't have the money," Mr. Murphy urged some 50 political and business leaders. "We'd love to do this, we'd love to do that, but we don't have the money." The whole conversation stops there.

"Imagine you have the money."

Mr. Murphy spoke at North Braddock's Grand View Golf Club at an event marking the one-year anni-



Rich Lord/Post-Gazette
Former Pittsburgh mayor Tom Murphy.

versary of the Enterprise Zone's effort to characterize the four boroughs as "East Shore."

The boroughs' fortunes aren't identical: Braddock is seeing redevelopment, and Swissvale is holding its own, while Rankin and North Braddock contend with fiscal problems.

They are united, though, in their eagerness to develop the former Carrie Furnace site, a 168-acre behemoth in Rankin and Swissvale that hasn't been an economic engine since the mill went cold in 1983. And some of their leaders have embraced the "East Shore" nickname as a means of making their Monongahela River area a destination, just as the North Shore on the Allegheny

River has been since Mr. Murphy led the push for new stadiums 20 years ago.

Mr. Murphy, mayor from 1994 through 2005, is now a senior resident fellow at the Urban Land Institute. He talked about the risks he took in supporting controversial tax proposals, granting hundreds of millions of dollars in subsidies to development and tightening the city's budget. He said that with Pittsburgh humming economically and becoming "too expensive" for many people, it's time for the Mon Valley to seize the day.

The question, he said, is "whether you have the political will to kick the door down, to change your behavior, to think about yourselves in a different way." He recommended that Mon Valley communities create a "Rivers Authority" in which they would combine their clout and development resources, and "beat up Rich Fitzgerald to help make this happen."

Mr. Fitzgerald, the Allegheny County executive, has ultimate authority over the Carrie Furnace site. Some of the assembled leaders said he pledged to them that he would green-light redevelopment of the site after

a large company — which they believed to be Amazon — made a decision on its future plans. They believe that the Carrie Furnace site is one of several in the region that have been offered to the Seattle-based online retail giant, which is weighing the location of its second headquarters.

"Once [Amazon] makes a decision, the next day, Fitzgerald said, [the county will] release their request for proposals to developers to see what they can do with the Carrie Furnace site," said William Pfoff, vice president of Rankin Borough Council, recounting a February meeting he attended with county, state and federal officials.

A county spokeswoman said the development department is "working on the [request for development proposals] and will release it when appropriate," but that no other information is available.

"It's an exciting time to live in these communities," added Mr. Pfoff, who is president of the Enterprise Zone. "East Shore? It's our call to action."

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