

# Route 33 interchange financing plan approved by Northampton County Council

Published: Thursday, October 20, 2011, 7:34 PM Updated: Thursday, October 20, 2011, 9:23 PM

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By Sarah Cassi | The Express-Times



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33 winds through Bethlehem Township, Pa. Officials want to put a Route 33 interchange in Palmer Township.

**Northampton County Council** signed off tonight on a tax-increment financing district to pay for a Route 33 interchange in Palmer Township.

The county was the last of three entities required to approve the TIF.

**Charles Chrin Cos.** proposed the TIF for the \$33.25 million interchange project. Chrin owns almost all the land within the TIF zone. The TIF will provide a 20-year bond for the development of 690 acres bordering seven municipalities.

**The plan was already approved by Palmer Township supervisors** and the Easton Area School Board. Council voted 6-1 for the plan. Council President **John Cusick** voted against the plan and Councilwoman Ann McHale abstained because of a family member's connection to Chrin. Councilman Tom Dietrich was absent for the vote.

But the night's heated discussion centered on the separate proposed deal that Chrin would give Northampton County 1.5 percent, up to \$2 million, of the gross sale price of each lot sold in the TIF. The funds would be used toward farmland preservation.

County council's vote on the TIF was contingent on proof of a signed deal, but Cusick said he had not received any contract or paperwork prior to tonight's meeting.

Councilman **Ron Angle**, who negotiated the deal with Chrin, said the final contract was not agreed upon until that afternoon.

**"It is a done deal,"** Angle said.

**"Why weren't members of council allowed time to review it?"** Cusick asked.

Cusick said council would not vote on something without reviewing it.

**"Has anybody seen a document?"** Cusick asked, to a silent dais.

**"Man, this is sad,"** Angle said.

County council solicitor Phil Lauer then went through each of the contract's requirements. Cusick asked why council was not voting on the funding deal. Lauer said there was nothing in the county's home rule charter or administrative code that required the contract be reviewed by council.

Later, Angle claimed the farmland deal **"had nothing to do with the TIF."** During the vote, Cusick said it was a **"disgrace"** council did not receive any paperwork on the funding deal before the meeting.

But others on council had nothing but good things to say about the interchange.

Councilman Mike Dowd called it **"an opportunity of a lifetime"** in terms of jobs creation.

During the 20 years of the bond, the township, county and school district would continue collecting all the property taxes. But most of the post-development tax gains would pay off the bond.

Under the proposed Route 33 interchange TIF, 100 percent of the post-development taxes would go toward the bond for the first five years and then it would switch to 80 percent in the remaining 15 years.

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