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The Boyertown community seems to be all aboard with plans to transform the historical Colebrookdale Spur into a tourist destination.

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Borough council recently heard plans from Nathaniel C. Guest to use the 8.6-mile line from Boyertown to Pottstown for passenger excursions featuring steam or diesel engines.

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Berks County bought the line for \$1.35 million in 2009. Since then, it has been traveled mostly by freight trains.

"What he was looking for from the borough was support of that endeavor," Borough Manager Patricia A. Loder said of Guest. "Not financial. He's not looking for the borough to operate it."

The line runs through downtown Boyertown, where there is an existing rail yard.

Council showed support by saying it would look into transferring a \$10,000 planning grant from state Department of Community & Economic Development to assist in planning the rail effort. A vote on the transfer is expected in March.

Boyertown was going to spend the grant to plan a parking lot on the borough-owned tract by the rail yard at East Third and Washington streets.

"We would attempt to redirect it (the grant) so it could be used to develop a plan that would show multiple features at the site," Loder said.

Those plans would include a 20,000-square-foot building, which could be a library, historical center and a community room, she said.

Guest, who identified himself as a volunteer advocate and train buff working with the Cornell University Preservation Planning Department, told council that tourist excursions in open rail cars and mahogany coaches from the World War I era might attract 20,000 to 50,000 riders a year.

On weekends from May to December, up to four trains a day could make the two-hour round trip, he said.

During the holiday season, "polar express" trains could bring Santa Claus to town and a Toys-for-Tots express could carry children of veterans and disadvantaged children to receive gifts from Santa.

Guest told council he could apply for a \$20,000 grant for an implementation study, but that would require a funding match from other sources.

Berks County Commissioner Mark C. Scott, the driving force behind the county's purchase of the spur, said pursuing a passenger excursion is a worthwhile experiment if it's started with a modest effort and performed mostly by volunteers.

"We remain focused on freight, but I think there's plenty of room to do both things," Scott said. "I believe it would be a boon to Boyertown's retail economy. The line is very scenic. It's very historic. I see it as something that would provide a benefit to other businesses."

Boyertown Mayor Marianne Deery called the proposal a wonderful idea.

"Why not? Boyertown is a beautiful town," Deery said. "We have a lot of stuff going on, and Pottstown also, they have a lot going on. Why can't we mutually benefit each other?"

Building a Better Boyertown, the borough's downtown revitalization program, also supports the idea, said Manager Adrienne L. Blank.

"I see it as a viable economic draw to the downtown that can help support our businesses as well as a scenic opportunity to expose some of the most beautiful views between the two towns," she said.

Blank is hopeful that the plan could turn the existing gravel lot at the rail yard into a town center with parking, a community center, a railroad station and green space.

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Nathaniel C. Guest at the Colebrookdale Spur in Boyertown. Guest hopes to turn the 8.6-mile line to Pottstown into a tourist attraction.

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