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City expands with Riverfork West

City annexes 181 acres of land across from Riverfork Industrial Park for industrial expansion

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The City of Huntington is expanding through the annexation of an approximately 181 acre tract of land just west of the current Riverfork Industrial Park.

The area of land is one that various entities and administrations within the City of Huntington have been eyeing for nearly 40 years to acquire

as part of the growing industrial community in Huntington.

"This has been the identified site for logical industrial growth that's well-positioned, that the use of land doesn't infringe on established neighborhoods," said Bryn Keplinger, director of Community Development & Redevelopment for the City of Huntington. "It's right next

to the existing industrial park, it's right next to a highway, it's got rail service — all those are key things for industrial park planning."

Of the 181 acres in the "Riverfork West" annexation area, Huntington County United Economic Development (HCUED) owns approximately 127 acres, and the other 27 acres belong to the Rogers family. Mark Wickersham, executive director for HCUED, says the goal accomplished under the Mayor Brooks Fetters administration has been a long time coming. "For a number of years — de-

acades — there's been a desire in the community, either in the economic development community or the city administrations directly, to acquire the parcel and create a new industrial park opportunity in our community for long-term growth and development," said Wickersham.

HCUED has already started performing due diligence work toward earning the state of Indiana's PRIME certification for property readiness and development. A few of the tasks HCUED must accomplish to receive PRIME certification for the 127 acres

they own includes the annexation and a commitment by the governmental unit in the jurisdiction to seek that the property will eventually develop.

Wickersham says whether the development is extending infrastructure or figuring out how to zone the land appropriately, the commitment will show cooperation between the City, HCUED and future clients.

According to Wickersham, the new area of land will allow the City of Huntington accommodate whatever

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businesses decide to develop on the land, including those on a local, regional, national and international scale.

"It helps us to be able to market ourselves and position ourselves and to have that reassurance that a company that's already here has a way to grow or a new company that might be interested," Wickersham said. "There's a location available that we can serve them with."

Wickersham calls the parcel of land an "asset on our community's balance sheet." Although the annexation becomes effective on the first of the year, Jan. 1, 2020, he says it could be 10 to 20 years before the City sees a significant impact on the tax base.

"Knowing that it took about 40 years for the existing park to become mature, we knew we needed to try to get started on our next 10 to 20 years worth of industrial growth as soon as we could," Wickersham said.

According to Keplinger, the land is not currently subject to municipal taxes. The area is subject to county tax rates,

which include Huntington County, Huntington Township, HCCSC, Huntington Library and solid waste. According to Indiana law, if a property meeting certain criteria is annexed, it is not subject to municipal taxes until the point at which it is no longer used as agricultural purposes.

The annexation is considered a "super voluntary" annexation, which means the petition contained 100 percent of the signatures of the land owners residing in the territory proposed to be annexed. This type of annexation can be completed on an abbreviated time schedule, according to a definition provided on the City's website.

According to Wickersham, the revenue from incremental growth would be captured by the redevelopment commission of the City because there is a tax increment financing district there. Any unencumbered funds could be redirected to help with other projects in the City.

The Riverfork West Annexation Area is located just across US-24 from the current Riverfork Industrial Park, and borders County Road 200 N. to the south and Norfolk Southern railway to the north.

As part of the annexation,

the City of Huntington had to adopt a written fiscal plan and policy for the provision of services to the area. The costs incurred by the City include an estimate from the street department in the amount of \$335 for supplies, repairs, fuel and maintenance, \$25 from the police department, and \$15 from City Utilities for street sweeping.

"Obviously they'll have to plow snow, and seal cracks and fill pot holes and things like that," Keplinger said.

The 181 acres of land is the largest area annexed by the City of Huntington since the super voluntary annexation along County Road 500 North which amounted to approximately 215 acres.

Huntington County became a leader in PRIME certification when the tract of land where the Golfo Di Napoli dairy and cafe is currently located became the first PRIME certified land in northeast Indiana. Since that certification on July 31, 2017, several other parcels of land have received PRIME certification in the 11 counties in the Northeast Indiana regional partnership, including a 20 acre site in Markle which has been purchased and is under development.