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City sees record industrial growth

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The findings from 2019's preliminary year-end report were summarized as 'a wonderful year for our industrial community' at Tuesday evening's city council meeting.

Mark Wickersham, executive director of Huntington County United Economic Development presented the report to the council on Dec. 10.

Wickersham facilitated 19

industrial projects in Huntington County, of which clients committed \$59.6 million in capital.

"That is a new record for my tenure at the agency. I'm not aware that the agency has done more than that before," said Wickersham. "Our previous record was \$40.2 million, and we've gone up just about \$20 million more in just the last 12 months. It's just been incredible."

The clients committed to

creating 182 new jobs, according to Wickersham, with average wages at \$23.30 an hour, an increase compared to last year's \$19.36 average.

The City of Huntington along with Huntington County United Economic Development (HCUED) also acquired ownership of 127 acres of land in the form of the new Huntington Riverfork Industrial Park West.

"At the county level we sold the last ten acres of land that

the county had helped us to purchase for Markle Industrial Park and that parcel then led to another 30-acre development we sold to Novae corporation that is still under development as we speak," Wickersham said. "In addition, we secured an option agreement on an additional 50-acre site at Markle Industrial Park and have it annexed and rezoned."

A new telecommunications project is underway to bring

fiber optic internet to the citizens of Markle, according to Wickersham. HCUED continues to work on steps required for PRIME certification for the Riverfork Industrial Park West area.

"I think we've demonstrated with both the Markle Industrial Park and the Warren property that that type of due diligence is what it takes to get an industrial project done

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in our current market," Wickersham said.

The overall unemployment rate within the county dropped by around 1.5 percent since January 2019 from 4.4 percent to just under 3 percent.

HCUED's business planning activities for the coming year include business retention and expansion activities, attraction activities, industrial site preparation, continued work with Northeast Indiana Regional Partnership, continued support and collaborative effort with the Huntington County Learning Center, the Huntington County Redevelopment Commission, and continued corporate outreach efforts.