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## Mayor reflects on city's future

Brooks Fetters said  
Huntington economy has  
advanced since his first term

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Huntington isn't perfect but it is making progress, Mayor Brooks Fetters says.

Fetters, a licensed funeral director and ordained minister with degrees in business and economics, said the city has made a lot of gains both economically and in its sense of community since 2012. It also has a lot to look forward to in the next few weeks.

There are several projects coming out of the box between now and Labor Day, he said, including a groundbreaking to be set this month for section four of the Little River Trail. Bids will also be accepted for rehabilitating the former railroad depot downtown into a hub for all the regional trails coming out of the city.

Beyond that, he said work continues on other sections of the trail and the city hopes

to move toward curbside recycling by the first of next year, an upgrade from the drop-off recycling available since 2008.

Fetters indicated he's seen a lot of green initiatives and quality of life improvements throughout Huntington since he was first elected, from the rehab of the pavilions at all city parks to the newly implemented bike sharing program. Many of the biggest



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changes have been lead by residents themselves, he said, from undertakings like city-wide garage sales and the Farmers Market to volunteers simply patrolling the parks or watering the flowers downtown.

It's part of what he sees as a growing sense of enthusiasm among citizens to give their time and talents toward improving the city.

"We have a sense of community pride developing all around the city," Fetters observed. "It takes everybody doing their part to make Huntington a great place... No one of us can do it all, but

we all can do something."

The Downtown Farmers Market began its fourth year in June and is now able to accept credit and debit cards as well as EBT and WIC vouchers. Organizer Robert Miller said getting the market into Indiana's Fresh Bucks program, which doubles the purchasing power of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program dollars at farmers markets, is a combination of progressive and conservative ideas by benefiting both local growers and SNAP users.

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He said civic involvement - getting to know your neighbors and pitching in to make your community a better place - is critical to the success of a city, and is something he sees every day in Huntington. He also told a meeting of Huntington County Democrats Wednesday that the county can build a small-business economy that makes younger people want to stay.

Attracting what he calls meaningful jobs has been another priority for Fetters, which he said is needed to make Huntington a place people love to call home. He said he's seen a number of business expansions in recent years, including a \$33.5 million project Continental Structural Plastics Inc. announced in April, while resources like the newly opened Huntington County Community Learning Cen-

ter will help people who need to upgrade their skills.

"We have a collaborative relationship with the county in promoting economic development," he said.

The unemployment rate in the county has dropped from 9.1 percent in January 2012 to 4.2 percent today, according to data from Huntington County Economic Development Corp. Director Mark Wickersham, while the industrial vacancy rate has dropped to 4.3 percent today from a 2008 high of 46.5 percent.

"It's an astonishing record for a county and city of our size," Wickersham said.

He listed a total of 54 industrial projects completed in the county between 2012 and 2016, with a combined investment of \$154 million. The projects also represent 1,010 new jobs and the retention of 6,406 existing jobs.

"Those team efforts have allowed the community to finally work from a more

comprehensive approach to economic development, away from the absolute urgency to only do what has traditionally been known as industrial development," Wickersham said. "Almost every employer I've assisted since joining the agency in 2008 is concerned about the ability to retain and attract talent in a sustainable way. Quality of life projects which truly support growth can help with the talent question, but also go to the heart of helping us enjoy living and working in our county and region."

Looking to his second term in office, Brooks said he's excited about where the city has been as well as where it's going.

"I love being mayor of my hometown, I love seeing good things happen to the people I care about," he said. "I like to talk a lot about, what are you willing to do for love of Huntington? The places we live aren't perfect, but they're ours."