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Record year for economic development

Officials say capital investments total more than \$40 million

BY JENNIFER PERYAM
jperyam@h-ponline.com

Despite the announcement that one of its largest employers would be leaving in the near future, Huntington had a record year for investment.

The Huntington Common Council discussed the uptick in economic development for 2016 at its final meeting on Tuesday evening.

According to Mark Wickersham, Huntington County Economic Development executive director, the cli-

ent base has set a record for capital investment of \$40 million.

"The economy has picked up nationally and internationally and there have been good opportunities in our county," Wickersham said.

This reflects eight projects, including Bendix, Continental Structural Plastics, Echo Lake Foods, Ecolab, Huntington Aluminum, Huntington Sheet Metal, Incipio Devices and Keystone Automotive Industries, according to Wickersham,

who said those projects have created 167 new jobs locally and retained 1,083 jobs.

"Economic development in general is done in order to systematically help a community enhance and preserve its economic vitality," Wickersham said. "Our industrial base over the years has restablized and the vibrancy of our community and its economic activity is so much better and it makes our area a better place to live, work and raise a family because things are happening."

He said in addition to the industrial announcement projects that have created

new jobs and a new tax base for the community, there are comprehensive projects, such as the opening of Park Loft Apartments, the trails projects that have been built this year in Huntington and the corridor improvement projects, such as the upcoming UB Odd Fellows Building and County Road 900 project.

While 2016 marked a high point in economic development, it also marked the year the city learned its largest employer – United Technologies Corp. – would be moving jobs to Mexico, leaving hundreds out of jobs by 2018. The announcement

in February angered many employees and attracted national attention, even from President-elect Donald Trump.

Despite that loss, Wickersham said there are still good economic projects going on in the county.

"There are a lot of exciting projects going on in Huntington County to be proud of and to benefit from and to root for our friends and family members and others in the community as they do good work," Wickersham said.

Kyle Hamilton, board

See **ECONOMIC** / Page A2

ECONOMIC

Continued from A1

treasurer, said the collaboration between the city and county has helped with eco-

nomical development.

"The continued focus that all of our local leaders have put on maintaining the jobs we have and making sure current employers have what they need and

are supported by the city and county and have done a great job of maintaining the jobs we have and trying to make Huntington County an inviting place to locate businesses," Hamilton said.