

GREATER FORT WAYNE Business Weekly

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Huntington to get new industrial park

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Huntington County United Economic Development Corp. plans to create a new industrial park on 127 acres it has purchased for \$2.1 million with the city of Huntington's financial backing.

"The city has pledged credit resources for the next 10 years to make it possible for HCUEDC to buy it. We're not interested in being the broker for the property; we just want to see it developed within

the city limits," said Huntington Mayor Brooks Fetters.

The acreage about two miles south of U.S. 24 is immediately west of Riverfork Industrial Park, across Indiana 9 from it. Both of the highways have four lanes.

At the northern border of the site is the Norfolk Southern railroad line and at its southern border is the Huntington County road 200 North.

"This becomes a tool in their toolbox to attract, retain and expand manufacturing interested in Huntington," Fetters said.

"For many years one of our top commitments has been the ongoing pursuit of meaningful jobs and economic development; it's just the lifeblood of any community."

The city needs to make the acreage available for industrial use because most of the space is occupied at Riverfork and at its other industrial sites, and it wants to be positioned to respond quickly to any manufacturers looking for a production

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location, he said.

"This is a piece of property the city has had interest in for roughly three decades," he said. "It is the spot we've been wanting."

Acquiring the property has taken several years partly because its ownership was equally shared on the title deed among nine family members, said Mark Wickersham, HCUEDC's executive director.

Each of them needed to agree to the sale, and together they had to create a legal transfer process that met the community's needs and would be acceptable to all the family members, he said.

"The previous owners were helpful in the process and local lending institutions made it possible to secure the property and pay the landowners. It's in a tax increment financing district controlled by the city's economic development commission," Wickersham said.

"None of it is annexed, but it is adjacent to a city limit line and close enough that we will pursue voluntary annexation on a spot basis as needed," he said.

"We have water and sewer to the

west side of the highway. It's not at our property line but could very easily be extended."

The economic development group is in the early stages of preparing marketing for the new industrial park and does not yet have a name for it.

The site would be served by Duke Energy Corp. for electricity, Vectren Corp. for natural gas and MetroNet, Frontier Communications Corp. or Comcast Corp. for broadband.

The property is still zoned for agricultural use, but the intention is to rezone it in a way that would be compatible with the city's comprehensive land use planning, Wickersham said.

Industrial park zoning in Huntington typically has encouraged assembly and light manufacturing, with some variances allowed for heavy industry. "We're trying to re-create the character of our existing industrial parks as we move forward," he said.

The industrial park could be larger than 127 acres because negotiations remain underway on adjacent properties, but the two key land parcels that were purchased determined whether



CONTRIBUTED

A new industrial park will be created from 127 acres in two land parcels purchased just west of Riverfork Industrial Park in Huntington.

an industrial park could be developed at the location, Wickersham said.

"We're hoping the acquisition will provide Huntington with an opportunity for growth of our industrial community over the next 20 years. It's a long-term investment

in the future of our industrial base," he said. "The property has almost unlimited potential for our community."

In addition to the mayor, the project has had the full support of the Huntington City Council and Huntington County Commissioners, Wickersham said.

"Successful economic development is a team sport with teams working together, collaborating and moving in the same direction with a can-do spirit," he said.

"We'd like to thank all of the partners in the local economic development community for their involvement, passion and commitment to this."

As HCUEDC undertakes the work of transforming the property into a new industrial park, the organization will prepare it to qualify for the Indiana Site Certified program's top-tier Prime designation, Wickersham said.

Officials expect that work to take more than a year, but he said the pace always could accelerate if a potential industrial tenant would require that.