

Liberty OKs JEDD

Mason, Middletown join township in tax district agreement

By ERIC SCHWARTZBERG
COX NEWS SERVICE

LIBERTY TOWNSHIP — The Liberty Township Board of Trustees entered into an agreement with the cities of Mason and Middletown during a public hearing Tuesday night.

The move paves the way for a special tax district that will create about \$178 million in revenues during the next four decades.

Mason City Council unanimously approved the joint economic development district Monday night and Middletown City Council unanimously approved it at a Jan. 17 hearing.

The JEDD will become effective in 10 days, at which point the township will seek the agreement of 51 percent of the landowners and business owners in the district to a 1.5 percent earnings and business profits tax.

Butler County Commissioners must then approve the district. Their support is also needed for about 40 percent of the \$30 million to \$50 million project.

Tax collections are expected this summer after a JEDD board is formed, said Liberty Township Administrator Dina Minneci.

Any employee who works in the proposed 685-acre district and receives a W-2 would be subject to the 1.5 percent earnings tax. Additionally, an enterprise tax would be collected from profits earned by businesses in the JEDD area, Minneci said. Business owners would add payroll, sales and property value, then divide that total by three and pay 1.5 percent of the resulting total.

"If it's one thing I'm going to emphasize now it's that this is not an income tax on Liberty Township residents," Minneci said.

Townships cannot assess income taxes unless a JEDD is formed, and to form one a township needs help from an entity

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at can, such as a city.

The developing area that would be formed into the JEDD aims to capture income tax benefits from the Liberty Interchange area near Ohio 129 and Cincinnati Dayton Road, where a new Kroger, Taco Bell and Peoples Community

Bank are being built.

The JEDD area includes the future site of Cincinnati Children's Hospital.

Tax revenue from the JEDD would be paid at least monthly with 78 percent going to Liberty Township, 15 percent to Mason and 7 percent to Middletown.

During the next 40 years, Liberty Township expects to collect about \$147 million, Minneci said. Mason and Middletown are projected to collect about \$27 million and \$3.5 million, respectively.

Preliminary estimates for the JEDD show the creation of

13,700 and 27,000 new jobs in the district by 2024, Minneci said.

"If it's one thing that the township wants to emphasize with this outlook for commercial development is we want to make certain that it develops in a way that is beneficial for the township and the stakeholders — the property owners, the business owners and the residents of this township."

The first phase of development in the JEDD area would take place later in 2006 or early next year and include widening Hamilton-Mason Road to five lanes from Interstate 75 to Butler

Warren County Line Road, said Jon West, the township's director of planning and zoning. The first phase also calls for extending Cox Road north to the south edge of Green Crest Gold Course to open up that land for commercial development, West said.

The second phase would widen Hamilton-Mason Road to the west, from I-75 to Cincinnati-Dayton Road.

Scheduled for 2008, the third phase would see the construction of new ramps connecting I-75 and Ohio 129 at Hamilton-Mason Road, allowing for traffic flow

east and west, as well as north and south, he said.

Liberty Township officials began talks with Mason and Hamilton three years ago to create the JEDD. Middletown was substituted for Hamilton earlier in 2005.

Liberty Township would provide expanded public services, including police protection, fire protection, civil defense, local government, administration and the like.

Revenues from the JEDD would enable the township to further improvements to planned

projects, such as the Liberty Interchange.

The city of Mason would be responsible for road improvements in Warren County for an improved transportation network leading to the JEDD area.

Under the JEDD's economic development plan, the city of Middletown would "administer, collect, and enforce" the income tax on behalf of the JEDD, as well as provide engineering support and financial analysis.

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LIBERTY TWP.

Taxing district approved

Starting in mid-summer, those who work in Liberty Township businesses where a highway interchange will be expanded will be charged a 1.5 percent earnings tax under a new taxing district trustees approved late Tuesday. The Liberty interchange, a \$30 million to \$50 million project, will expand the current Interstate 75-Ohio 129 interchange and add ramps at Hamilton-Mason Road. The project is expected to improve traffic and economic development. Construction on the first leg of the project, widening Hamilton-Mason Road from two to five lanes between Butler-Warren Road and Cox Road, could begin as early as July. The ramps will be built in 2008. It will be funded partially from proceeds from the joint economic development district over 685 commercially zoned acres in Liberty. Liberty will receive most of the projected net revenue – 83 percent – from the district, which is expected to generate from \$6 million to \$1.2 million each year by 2024. Mason and Middletown also are part of the agreement; both have already signed off on the venture.