

Exit money for Liberty now stalled

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By Jennifer Edwards
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LIBERTY TWP. - Funding is stalled for a new Interstate 75 exit to relieve traffic congestion and attract commercial development.

"Quite honestly, we are talking about the future of Liberty Township," Trustee Christine Matacic said.

The \$30 million to \$50 million project is to be paid for in part by a special tax district called a joint economic development district. It would allow a 1.5 percent earnings tax to be collected from hundreds of workers in a 960-acre area surrounding the Liberty interchange.

The district is projected to generate \$6 million to \$11 million in earnings taxes annually by 2024, assuming the land is fully developed into business use.

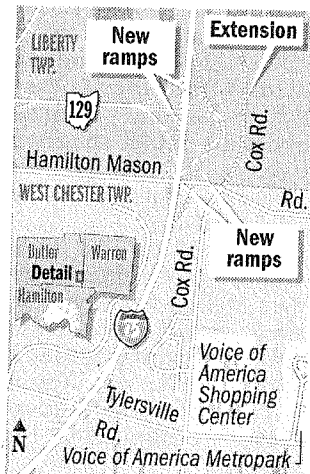
To impose the tax voluntarily, Liberty Township officials have been trying to convince a majority of property and business owners in the tax district area to join it.

While some of the largest property owners have, most have not. So far, 79 (24 percent) out of 333 have agreed, according to the township; 51 percent is needed.

"Some of these businesses just don't have time to sit down and talk about it," Matacic said. "Others may look at it and say, 'I am not sure about this. I'll check into it' and then they just never get into doing it. Others may look at it and say, 'It's a tax. I don't want anything to do with a tax.'"

Liberty officials hoped to begin receiving the tax money by mid-summer.

The township recently entered into a contract not to exceed \$20,000 with KMK Consulting Co. of Cincinnati to



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contact each property or business owner and explain the benefits of joining the tax district. The township will re-evaluate the situation in 45 days.

At the end of June, if enough owners still haven't agreed, they could decide to ask voters to decide on the fall ballot whether the township should impose the tax district.

Another option would be to keep trying to convince the business owners to join, possibly delaying construction.

If the interchange isn't built soon, leaders fear the land surrounding it will be developed as homes, as much of the township already has.

That means a higher tax burden for residents for things like schools, roads and fire service, Matacic noted.

"We don't have all the information to even make a decision," said Jason Harter, head pro at the 110-acre Green Crest Golf Course adjacent northbound I-75 in Liberty Township. His family owns the golf course.

"Most people don't enjoy being taxed at all," he said.

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