

Business First of Columbus - June 12, 2006

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## Columbus, Pickaway County communities agree to development deal

Business First of Columbus - by [Brian R. Ball](#) Business First

An effort by Columbus and three communities to develop as many as 2,000 acres in northern Pickaway County will preclude Columbus from annexing land from Harrison Township for nearly 50 years.

The plan for a joint economic development district, or JEDD, among Columbus, Ashville, South Bloomfield and Harrison Township also calls for sharing tax revenue and the cost of roads and utility lines as developers begin to eye the area on the southern edge of Rickenbacker International Airport for distribution centers and related freight-transportation operations.

The agreements to create the development district and set up the annexation moratorium will go before Columbus City Council June 12. Votes by the communities will be taken after a scheduled June 15 public hearing on the agreements in Ashville.

"The importance of the moratorium is to say ... that development will occur through the (joint economic development agreement), not through annexation," said Nate Green, economic director for Pickaway Progress Partners, formerly called the Circleville-Pickaway Community Improvement Corp.

The development district agreement also calls for property tax revenue generated in the township to remain in Pickaway County to fund local services, Green said, and the annexation moratorium keeps existing communities intact.

It's preserving Harrison Township, Green said of the agreement.

The moratorium affects 3,500 acres while the development district initially centers on 936 acres.

Green said the annexation ban, which extends through 2055, preserves the rights of landowners who may not want to have their land developed. Annexations can pull in reluctant landowners if their neighbors agree to it.

"Under the JEDD, only the landowners who want to be part of the JEDD will go into the JEDD," Green said.

Mark Barbash, development director for Columbus, said the agreements serve as a model for economic development cooperation in the region.

"We're breaking new ground here," he said. "We're going to be providing sewer service without annexation."

Financing the deal

The development district includes 293 acres owned by [Norfolk Southern Corp.](#) and 643 acres owned by the Columbus Regional Airport Authority, the operator of Rickenbacker airport.

The agreement to create the district stems in part from Norfolk Southern's plans to build a truck-and-rail transfer station - called an intermodal yard - and the port authority's plans to develop industrial projects under a venture with Indianapolis-based Duke Realty Corp. and Capitol Square Ltd., the real estate development arm of [Dispatch Printing Co.](#) in Columbus.

Green said the proposed legislation sets up a governing board of community representatives to oversee capital improvements for the district.

Roads and utilities would be financed in part through half the revenue generated from a 2 percent income tax imposed on those working in the district.

The other half would be split among Columbus, which would get a 70 percent share, and Ashville, South Bloomfield and Harrison Township, which would get 10 percent each. The agreement doesn't preclude establishing tax-incremental financing districts as another way to pay for projects, Green said.

Columbus has begun extending sewer service to the area. It also will bring water pipes to the county line, where the Earnhart Hill Regional Water & Sewer District will tap in under a master-meter agreement to distribute water throughout the development district. The joint-economic district has been in the works for more than two years as a way to improve the attractiveness of Rickenbacker for the next round of development. Officials estimate logistics projects could create 60,000 to 70,000 jobs in northern Pickaway County during the next three decades.

The county has 24,000 jobs within its boundaries.

"It's as much the jobs as it is being able to put Columbus in the top tier of mid-country logistics locations," Barbash said.

He gave the broadest estimate of \$100 million to \$150 million in infrastructure improvements that the development district partners may have to finance.

"The most important estimate is the billions of dollars of new investments and wages coming out this strategy," Barbash said.

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