

Pickerington city officials still angry about CEDA agreement

By AARON D. MARTIN

Pickerington Times-Sun Reporter

"I think it's disgusting," Pickerington Mayor Randall Hughes said of the agreement Violet Township officials are preparing to enter into with Canal Winchester village officials.

Township and village officials signed letters of intent for a cooperative economic development agreement last week.

The land targeted in the agreement is 800 acres in Fairfield County along U.S. Route 33.

Pickerington city officials had been making plans to annex that land, and develop a business/industrial park on it.

City Council President Lou Postage characterized the township officials' move as underhanded.

Hughes agreed, and took the characterization a step further.

"It is the ultimate in

duplicity and hypocrisy," Hughes said.

Township officials said they had been working with Canal Winchester on the CEDA for several months before it was announced.

During that time period, township officials had been meeting with city officials in open forums to discuss issues of growth.

Hughes said city officials should have been informed of those meetings, if not involved in them.

"While they're dragging their feet with us on a cooperative agreement, they're doing deals in the dark with Canal Winchester," Hughes said. "I would think as a trustee you would look to the biggest tax base, and the only city completely in the county, to make a deal."

"We are a service provider to that area, so we should have been at the table," Hughes said.

Violet Township Board of Trustees Chairman Terry

Dunlap said there was no need to inform Pickerington officials of the work with Canal Winchester, or invite them to the table.

"Why would we need to talk to Pickerington about Canal Winchester issues?" Dunlap said. "It wasn't appropriate to involve them, just like it wasn't appropriate to involve Canal Winchester in our meetings with Pickerington."

The two major points of contention for Hughes is the revenue he said is lost to Pickerington's school district, and the proposed Hill-Diley interchange.

"That deal puts the Hill-Diley interchange in the hands of Franklin County," Hughes said. "The most important development to this area will now be decided by Canal Winchester."

Dunlap said the proposed CEDA does not affect land annexation, and that the Hill-Diley interchange will remain in the hands of Fairfield

County officials.

"When the idea for the interchange first came up we wanted the plans moved so that both districts (Pickerington and Canal Winchester) would benefit, but the only ones who supported us in that were the county officials," Dunlap said.

The announcement of the CEDA came on the heels of city officials approving legislation to reimburse the township for road and bridge levy money lost when land was annexed by the city.

Hughes said he would now give serious thought to vetoing that legislation.

"I believe in keeping your word," Hughes said. "If the council still wants it, I'll go along."

However, while Dunlap said he is still willing to work with city officials on a similar CEDA, Hughes is skeptical any such deal will happen.

"Why would we look at working on a CEDA or JEDD

(Joint Economic Development District) with these people? Can we trust them?" Hughes said.

"They should have asked how can we be a part of the cooperative community," Dunlap said of the issues city officials are raising. "Without the agreement, all but six-

tenths of a mill would be lost to Canal Winchester in annexation. With the agreement, one and one-half mills stay, along with 20 percent of the net income tax of that area comes into the township."

"This agreement is a good thing," Dunlap said.

CEDA

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"In my discussion with personnel from the city of Pickerington, I was under the impression that as far as future industrial development, the city was looking at land in the very south end of Violet Township," Yocum said. "I understood that that wasn't within the school district, but the mayor said it worked out with the city's Joint Utility Agreement with Canal Winchester."

"It's true that area isn't within school boundaries, but that would give them access to land in the school district," Yocum said. "That's the same area for the CEDA. What's to keep Canal Winchester from coming across 33 to annex land for Canal before Pickerington does?"

"Canal Winchester and the city of Pickerington have worked together in the past on agreements like this that clearly separate areas by school district lines," Hall said, citing the Joint Utility Agreement as an example.

"(As per the Joint Utility Agreement) has put Canal Winchester into systems like wastewater treatment," Hall said. "We serve the entire area affected by the agreement, including parts of Pickerington, but the

we've been involved in the development of that area since 1995. It shouldn't be a surprise that we have the interest of the area at heart."

"People seem to forget that everyone living within city boundaries are also township residents," Yocum said.

"What concerns me is that it appears Violet Township funds will be used to develop an industrial park within the township, but with 70 percent of the revenue going to benefit a village in an entirely different county," he said.

"I heard one person say this is like a brother and sister fighting over their parents' inheritance," Yocum added, "and then the distant cousin comes in during the commotion and takes everything."

Individual concerns

Other major concerns have come from individual community members, Hall said.

"Most of what we're hearing from individual citizens is 'What does this mean for me and my property?'" Hall said. "The best thing about this agreement is that, unless you want it to, it doesn't have to mean anything."

"One thing we want to clear up is that this is not going to mean a huge win-

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