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Lebanon looks for ways to connect fairgrounds and Farm Heritage Trail

■ Expanding fire protection also an objective

BY ROD ROSE
The Lebanon Reporter

LEBANON — Finding a path through Lebanon for the link between the Farm Heritage Trail and the Boone County Fairgrounds is one of Mayor Huck Lewis' objectives, he said at his first State of the City speech last week.

Expanding fire protection by forging agreements with other fire departments is another.

The city is attempting to buy two sites on the east side of Indianapolis Avenue adjacent to the Boone County Fairgrounds, Lewis said.

One of the sites, a long-abandoned gas station, could become the trailhead for a walking and biking path stretching from Abner Longley Park to a railroad right-of-way and, eventually, trails in Zionsville.

The other site, the former Family Chevrolet dealership, would become a public safety building for police, fire and emergency medical services, Lewis said.

Revenue from a TIF — tax increment financing — district would pay for the public safety building, Lewis said. Excess money from a TIF that covers much — but not all — of Lebanon Business Park could be used for the structure, because it would benefit the companies there.

Lewis said the city is pursuing a grant that would continue the trail "along the front and around the corner of the fairgrounds," where it could tie into the rail bed that runs through Whitestown to Zionsville. The Farm Heritage Trail, which begins north of Thorntown, will eventually reach Lebanon near Sam Ralston Road.

A section of the trail will follow sidewalks being constructed along Hendricks Drive in front of Hattie B. Stokes Elementary School. A path for the trail from there to Sam Ralston Road hasn't been determined, Lewis said.

Basing fire units near Interstate 65 and the Hall-Baker Road overpass would speed response time to both Lebanon Business Park and to the Interstate 65 annexation area, Lewis said.

Under an automatic aid agreement with the Whitestown Fire Department, the city has already

guaranteed faster responses to incidents in the annexation area, he said.

Lebanon Fire has based Tanker 12, which holds 1,500 gallons of water, at Whitestown's station at County Road 575 East and Perry-Worth Road. Lebanon Fire Chief Ted Caldwell said in September when announcing the arrangement, that it would reduce response times for fires in the annexation area.

Last week, Lewis said, Whitestown FD responded to a traffic accident with serious personal injury on I-65 under the automatic aid agreement. WFD units arrived in five minutes; Lebanon FD units were two minutes behind.

"For those people in that accident, two minutes could be a matter of life and death," Lewis said.

Lebanon has had an automatic aid agreement with Center Township Fire Department since mid-2008, and is in talks with Perry Township Fire Department for a similar arrangement, Lewis said.

State law requires Lebanon provide municipal services, including police and fire protection, to an annexed area within five years.

Lewis said he welcomed calls and comments from the public about the projects.