

Henry favors coordinating development efforts

By Benjamin Lanka

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Fort Wayne Democratic mayoral nominee Tom Henry wants to meet regularly with the heads of all local economic development groups as a way to better coordinate efforts.

On Monday, Henry called for the creation of an economic development coordinating council, which would be formed by the leaders of the community's different economic development groups. He said the new group would improve collaboration in the effort to attract new jobs.

"All of these groups are meeting different needs right now," Henry said. "What we need to do is to make sure they are not overlapping their efforts and our economic development monies are being spent wisely."

Henry said he didn't think there was any actual overlap among the groups but more of a perceived overlap from residents.

Henry said the city spends \$550,000 annually on the Northeast Indiana Innovation Center, the Northeast Indiana Regional Marketing Partnership, the Fort Wayne Allen County Economic Development Alliance and the Downtown Improvement District.

Other groups would be included, such as the Greater Fort Wayne Chamber of Commerce, Indiana Economic Development Council, WorkOne Northeast, Northeast Indiana Corporate Council and the Northeast Indiana Regional Coordinating Council.

Henry said the groups already meet informally, but he would like to formalize the process with the mayor in the lead. While he isn't sure how often the group should meet, he said it would at least meet quarterly.

Republican mayoral nominee Matt Kelty disagreed with Henry's plan and said there is no need to create another committee to help economic development. He said the different groups serve different goals, and they would be better served to coordinate with the Alliance.

Where it makes sense, Kelty said other groups should move into or next to the Alliance's office to help build relationships. He also said he would support providing more resources to the Alliance for economic development specialists.

Henry said the new group would not require any staff or budget. He said it was more of a way for the different groups to learn from one another and maximize strengths.

Because the groups all serve different roles in economic development, Henry said the coordinating council could also serve as an educational tool to inform the public of the good work being done by each agency.

Henry said he spoke with many of the different groups who would be involved in the council, and they all expressed support for the idea.

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