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Interchange atop group's stimulus priorities

Task force whittles wish list to push for most-needed projects

BY AMY HOLLON
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NEWARK — Members of the Licking County Economic Stimulus Task Force picked a potential Cherry Valley Road interchange on Ohio 16 as the transportation project they most hope to get money for.

Because more than 300 projects have been submitted locally and almost 20,000 projects have been submitted to the state, the task force was formed by a group of government entities and private businesses to sort through the projects and choose a few to heavily advocate.

The group doesn't make any decisions about how money will be spent. Instead, members said it is working to alert state politicians and bureaucrats about the

LOCAL TRANSPORTATION PRIORITIES

The Licking County Economic Stimulus Task Force hopes to push for money for the following transportation projects:

- Ohio 16-Cherry Valley Road interchange
- Pataskala Job Ready Site, Etna Parkway Extension
- Etna Ohio 310 widening
- Waterworks Road-Deo Drive realignment
- Thornwood Drive
- Hebron High Street resurfacing
- Bike-path resurfacing
- Heath bike-trail extension

For more information go to stimulustaskforce.com or see

descriptions of the projects at NewarkAdvocate.com.

OHIO'S REQUESTS FOR STIMULUS DOLLARS

There have been more than 19,550 requests for federal stimulus dollars submitted to the Ohio Federal Stimulus Initiative Web site.

The total amount requested so far, including duplicate submissions, is more than \$1.16 trillion.

Search the list by county. NewarkAdvocate.com/stimulus.

projects that most will benefit the county.

The group started with transportation projects because of impending deadlines. It picked projects based on job creation, economic impact, long-term value, local context and the like-

hood of getting funding.

"Obviously Cherry Valley Road should be the top project on everybody's list," said Cheri Hottinger, president of the Licking County Chamber of Commerce.

STIMULUS FROM 1A

"When you are talking about expanding (Ohio 161/37/16), ultimately you want to have (the highway extend) from Columbus to Coshocton with no stops."

Safety also is a concern once the Ohio 161/37 expressway project from New Albany to Granville is complete, and an interchange could help improve safety in the area.

In 2005, U.S. Rep. Pat Tiberi, whose district includes much of western Licking County, obtained a \$2 million federal earmark

to pay two-thirds of the cost of environmental studies and preliminary engineering, but the money never was spent.

"(After that), we lost the attention," Hottinger said. "We just need to bring the attention and momentum back."

OTHER TOP PROJECTS

The Etna Parkway extension into the Job Ready Site in Pataskala also made the list.

Licking County Commissioner Tim Bubb said the current plan is to build a two-lane road, but eventually a four-lane road is ex-

pected. Stimulus funds could allow the four-lane road to be built now and a second portion of the road to be completed at the same time.

"We looked at the requirements for stimulus funding ... (and) what we are trying to do is fund some stimulus money into a project that is almost ready to go," Bubb said.

Hottinger said like the Job Ready Site, the Thornwood Drive expansion is an important project on the list because any time a project can open up undeveloped industrial land, the potential for new employ-

ment is high.

Rick Platt, president and CEO of the Heath-Newark-Licking County Port Authority, said when he worked for Sen. George Voinovich they used to tell local leaders that if they knew what they wanted, they could get it.

Platt said that is the philosophy guiding the group now.

"Now that we have said here are the priorities, the advocacy begins," Platt said.

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