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## \$9M travel plaza plan sparks cooperation

### 380-acre development at I-71 interchange

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By [Lawrence Budd](#)

Staff Writer

LEBANON - A 10-acre, \$9 million Flying J Travel Center likely will be the first sign of a 380-acre economic development district being formed around the Interstate 71 interchange southeast of Lebanon.

The travel center would cover 10.9 of 382 acres in the proposed district. Local officials and land owners hope to draw manufacturing, corporate headquarters or office campuses in addition to restaurants, hotels and other developments typically found around a Flying J Travel Center.

"Once you get a Flying J in there, hold onto your hat. More is coming," said Jonathan Samms, a Turtlecreek Twp. trustee.

Pilot Flying J, based in Tennessee, is expected to spend \$7.5 million on the facility, about \$1.7 million on the land, officials said.

Last month, Pilot Flying J said 50 jobs would be created with the opening of a similar center in Iowa. The company did not respond to questions about the center proposed at Ohio 123 and I-71.

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The center planned outside Lebanon is expected to include a variety of facilities for truck drivers, a deli, a Wendy's with a drive thru and two sets of fuel pumps on land around an existing Country Kitchen restaurant, according to plans submitted to the county and obtained by the Dayton Daily News.

The city of Lebanon and Turtlecreek Twp. are forming a joint economic development district as part of a cooperative plan to extend sewer service to land on all four corners of the I-71 interchange at Ohio 123 without annexation by Lebanon.

"The Pilot travel center is what makes everything possible," said Joe Kramer, executive vice president for Henkle Schueler & Associates, one of the largest commercial real estate firms in the region. Henkle-Schueler represents three limited partnerships with land in the proposed district.

The Warren County Regional Planning Commission is reviewing plans for the travel center on the northeast corner of the I-71 interchange at Ohio 123.

The Ohio EPA is reviewing an application for a package sewage plant for the travel center in anticipation of opening in spring 2013. However local officials said the travel center and surrounding area instead could be served by a \$2.6 million sewer extension to be financed with \$176,000 a year in property taxes on improvements for the travel center.

Pilot would contribute \$500,000 and the city of Lebanon \$80,000 to help pay for or secure bonds to be sold by the Warren County Port Authority to finance the sewer extension, according to an agreement for the proposed economic development district.

The extended sewer line also could serve land beyond the 380-acre district, Lebanon Economic Development Director Jason Millard said.

Already there are more than 600 Pilot Flying J travel centers in the U.S. and Canada including 32 in Ohio, seven along I-71, according to the company web site.

Various governmental offices will review the agreements underlying the Warren County plan, including a tax incremental financing agreement and an overlay setting the boundaries of the joint economic development district.

"If one of these components falls through, the whole thing may fall through," said Mike Yetter, zoning supervisor in Warren County.

Jillora Summers, chief operating officer for 1st National Bank in Lebanon, represents owners of the land for the proposed travel center.

Kramer and Summers were part of a steering committee that met during the past six months to develop the district. Area officials and land owners have been discussing the joint economic development district (JEDD) for a decade.

Samms and Commissioner Tom Ariss were the elected officials on the steering committee also including representatives from the different land owners and staff from the city, township and county.

Lebanon and Turtlecreek Twp. would split 90 percent of income taxes from workers at the travel center, Samms said. The local

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governments would set aside 8 percent of income tax revenues for improvements around the interchange, including signs, landscaping, bike paths and sidewalks.

“This is a gateway into our community,” Samms said. Lebanon would keep 2 percent for administering the income tax.

In addition to the Country Kitchen, two service stations, a church and auto repair business are in the existing development. Most of the land remains farm fields.

There are plans to improve the surrounding road network, but not the interchange, according to transportation officials. Beyond the proposed district boundaries are several residential subdivisions and homes along country roads.

Residents and other members of the public will be able to weigh in on the plan as it goes before county planning officials and the Warren County commissioners in coming months.

A public hearing on the JEDD is scheduled for 7 p.m., Nov. 13, at Lebanon City Hall. The first of two readings of Lebanon’s proposed agreement with Turtlecreek Twp. is scheduled for the Nov. 27 city council meeting, Millard said.

Debra Smith and Lola McCain are neighbors on Settlemire Road, which borders the area west of the interchange. Last week, both were unaware of the development plan.

“They have been talking about it for years,” McCain said, noting existing traffic problems. “I think it would be a good idea.”

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