

Economic Development Insight

West Gate and its Impact on Jobs and Greene County's Tax Base

By John Mensch and Joan Bethell

Previous articles in this paper have discussed job creation and West Gate at Crane has been mentioned, but here we will look at it more closely. Why do we support it? Why do we feel it is needed for the people of Greene County? What are its benefits?

The Tech Park we know as "West Gate @ Crane" will provide the two fundamental objectives of economic development; job creation and tax base growth. For years adults in Greene County have complained that there are not jobs available for their children and grandchildren in Greene County or the surrounding area. Our Tech Park, West Gate at Crane, is a tremendous asset in addressing this issue.

Currently there are two buildings occupied in the park employing 85 people. There are three buildings under construction and we just broke ground on the MLE building last Thursday. Concurrent with these new buildings is the creation of an additional 200-215 jobs that cover a full spectrum of occupations, including clerical, maintenance, technicians and engineers.

Lieutenant Governor Becky Skillman spoke at the MLE Enterprises ground-breaking event and Governor Mitch Daniels spoke at the SAIC ground-breaking in 2007, indicating that the importance of West Gate @ Crane to this region and to the State of Indiana is being supported at the highest levels of our state government. Several other announcements should be coming before the end of the year.

Our Greene County tax base will increase in several ways. First and most obvious are the buildings in the Tech Park. These new property taxes will go to the tax increment financing (TIF) district, where they will be used for infrastructure development in Greene County, which encourages further economic growth and development in our county.

A second area of new tax base creation will be caused by the increase in new family housing. Typically, a relocating company brings with it some of its key executives and staff members. Greene County should position itself to capture these employees and their families. Also, the jobs created at West Gate will require additional employees, some of which will already live in Greene County and some will commute from other communities, such as Bloomington. With gas prices so extremely high it only stands to reason these new employees will over time wish to live closer to their work. Current employees at NSWC Crane and West Gate may also come to the same conclusion.

This will require new infrastructure and housing in Greene County. Waste water treatment with the attendant sewer lines are the most costly to develop. Water is abundant and readily available from Eastern Heights Utilities and electricity from UDWI-REMC. Gas is also easily accessed and available.

Housing can evolve in several forms, single family housing, multi-unit apartments, and condominiums. This new housing will pay property taxes that will go to our county coffers. Additionally, our county government will capture the County Option Income Tax (COIT) revenues for all of those living in Greene County, regardless of where they work.

A third area, not to be forgotten, is the impact of the Interstate 69 interchange just north of West Gate on US 231. It will bring additional jobs and create tax base that will not be directly associated with West Gate, but both will be very real and beneficial to Greene County.

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An additional benefit of West Gate and I-69 is the strong support they provide to NSWC Crane in the event of another Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) process. Two deficiencies faced by Crane in past BRAC processes have been the lack of a technical park to support the naval base and a nearby interstate for logistical support. Thus, job preservation for the approximately 1700 Greene County residents that are part of the Crane-related workforce is also addressed by West Gate.

Therefore, West Gate at Crane is good for all of Greene County. We must pull together as a county and support this most important effort. West Gate is the biggest economic development project to impact our county since the construction of NSWC Crane nearly 70 years ago. As we work toward the creation of new jobs and increasing our tax base we must remember that economic development is a long term proposition over many years not a short term sprint.

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