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## Fostoria to start construction soon on train-watching park

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FOSTORIA — Fostoria's long-awaited project to build a train-watching park on a former industrial site between junctions of three busy rail lines is finally on track for construction.

City officials recently awarded a nearly \$1.1 million contract to Fostoria-based Whitta Construction and expect work to begin by late next month on the five-acre site bounded on three sides by railroad tracks.

The contractor has until about the end of the year to finish the Iron Triangle Visitors' Center, which will feature a building with a raised pavilion and restrooms and have a paved access drive and parking and decorative fences.

But Mayor Eric Keckler and City Engineer Dan Thornton said they expect completion in the fall unless, as Mr.

Thornton put it, "something really goes haywire with the weather."

"This has the potential of growing into something big," Mayor Keckler said, describing the park as the potential starting point for a rail-themed museum or other attractions that could bring in visitors with more casual interest in trains than the railroad buffs who already flock to Fostoria.



Ellen Gatrell, secretary-treasurer for the Fostoria Rail Preservation Society, said construction will fulfill her group's involvement of more than 10 years with the project, which has been designed "the correct way with a lot of thought" and consultation with rail enthusiasts.

"We will never please everyone, we just need to make sure it's logical and uses the area to its best advantage," Ms. Gatrell said. "What better place to see all the live train action right in the Iron Triangle, and be so close to the rail traffic."

Mr. Keckler said the site's layout is planned with photographers in mind. While current city ordinance sets sunrise to sunset as the operating hours for all Fostoria parks, he added, city council could consider special hours for the Iron Triangle site if there is substantial demand.

Fostoria previously used a \$300,000 federal grant to level the former site of a pork-packing plant, adjacent to a former stockyards site that now belongs to the Fostoria Economic Development Corp.

Demolition of a building on the stockyards site began last week, and Mr. Thornton said that while initially that site will merely be cleared, its future redevelopment could be complementary to the train-watching park.

While a nuisance for local residents, Fostoria's busy rail activity attracts train-watchers from across North America and even overseas. At all times of year but especially during the warmer months, many congregate in a parking lot near the city's former Amtrak station or along Columbus Avenue at the park site's northeast corner. Although no passenger trains serve Fostoria, more than 100 freight trains operated by Norfolk Southern and CSX Transportation pass through the city on a typical day, making Fostoria one of the busiest freight-train places in the United States.

The park project has been more than a decade in the making.

"I have regular emails and calls all of last year and so far this year asking me when it's going to get done," Mayor Keckler said.

Mr. Thornton said similar enthusiasm burst out in September, 2007, when the Ohio Department of Transportation announced an \$815,760 grant to pay 80 percent of the construction cost.

“We had calls the next day asking when we were going to start construction,” the city engineer said.

The city will pay the balance of the project’s cost from capital-improvement funds that have accumulated since the grant was awarded, Mr. Thornton said, noting that the construction bid came in significantly below the estimated cost.

Although drawings show several “future” elements, including a raised mound on the site’s southeast corner and a second building, bidding rules do not allow those extras to be added to the contract, Mr. Thornton said. Bidding did include an “alternate” item to pave the park’s parking lot instead of surfacing with crushed stone, he said, and that will be included.

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Read more at <http://www.toledoblade.com/local/2013/03/20/Fostoria-to-start-construction-soon-on-train-watching-park.html#IgWdd1QTGZoDxzO1.99>