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## Mayor talks taxes, tourism

### Economic growth focus of town hall event

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Tourism and tax rates were the focus of Thursday's Evening with the Mayor event at the Wabash Museum.

An Evening with the Mayor is a quarterly event in which the public can discuss the city's successes and shortcomings in a casual setting, and this was the second one Mayor Scott Long has hosted this year.

Executive Director of Visit Wabash County Christine Flohr explained the importance of tourism in the city as "a bonus" to the local government and residents. She said that dollars collected through tourism offer relief to taxpayers that might otherwise be collected through an increase in taxes.

From increases in local revenue to residents relocating to Wabash, Flohr said, "Everything starts with a visit."

According to a report card of Visit Wabash County's economic impact, 45 cents of every dollar spent by

visitors "remained local," meaning it went into local infrastructure. Flohr said sure signs of progress are the multiple construction zones scattered throughout the city right now.

"Some of you are annoyed by it, but I love it," she said. "That shows that your city is reinvesting back into each of you... We are economically healthy, and that's when you start to see progress."

Long said the ongoing construction at Alber Street will soon enter its second and final phase in June. A portion of John Kissinger Drive near U.S. 24 will close

down during phase two, Long said, and will reopen within 30 days.

Construction will begin later this year for a new outdoor fitness center, courtesy of National Fitness Campaign (NFC). NFC selected Wabash as the next community to receive such a gym, in which residents can use the outdoor facility for quick, circuit-style workouts using their own body weight as resistance.

Long said the gym will go near the Wabash Riverwalk, and the city has "asked for the Ford family's blessing," in removing the limestone

wall and pillars near the Ind. 15 entrance to the city.

He said the pillars might be visually overpowered at the completion of the city's gateway project, which will be finished later this year, so the plan is to remove and re-purpose.

"We're going to remove the pillars and stone wall, saving as much of it as we can, and we're hoping we can find a more suitable place for it somewhere else in the city.

Flohr said they have a list of ongoing projects to

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increase interest. When asked what city or town they look to as an example, she said they make decisions based on data and implement strategies that they know have worked elsewhere.

"We just keep a file of bits and pieces and we work them in where it's appropriate, and we try to do it better than where we were inspired by," she said.

When opened up for questions, some residents asked Long if they might revisit including county residents on the local library tax that allows them to have a card free of charge. Long, and others who had formerly served on the Wabash Carnegie Library Board, stated the decision was up to the county. Suzie Jones, a former library board member, said the county had previously addressed residents' desire for free access outside of the city limits, but it was shot down when it went to a

vote.

Long said that residents should be able to have access to library cards free of charge if they are willing to pay the tax that city residents pay. Unrelated to the library tax, Long said he fought to lower the Wabash tax rate by 6 cents. However, he said county entities "captured those savings."

"The assessments on the property went up, in my case \$14,400. Had the assessment remained steady or only raised slightly, most homeowners would have had a reduction in property taxes due to our decrease in tax rate," he said.

During the event, he said residents that feel they were improperly assessed can apply for an appeal with the county assessor's office.

The next Evening with the Mayor event is scheduled for Aug. 15 at 6 p.m. Long said he plans to have guests speakers from the city's drug steering committee to answer audience questions regarding the local approach to the national drug crisis.