

Birmingham Mayor Larry Langford this morning laid out his plans to City Council members to completely revitalize Fair Park, a \$125 - \$150 million project that would be funded using portions of the recent sales and business tax increases, and could be completed in three years. All Langford needs now is the Council's approval of the plan. It will be on their agenda Tuesday.

"If ever there was a place that needs a shot in the arm, it's Five Points West," he said.

Langford said the project could be built debt-free using millions that the taxes are generating, plus unused money in the city's budgets from stalled or inactive school and other capital projects. The city's \$55 million would jumpstart the economic development process.

Additional money would come from the retailers that developer Alto Tarver III is recruiting, naming rights for the proposed sports facilities (including indoor and outdoor running tracks and a natatorium with Olympic-sized swimming pools) and revenues from taxes potential new businesses will generate.

He also said the project has generated much interest from retailers and other developers. Several are talking about putting at least two hotels on the site, he said. Langford also gave the six Council members present letters from retailers who expressed interest in building a grocery store, pharmacy, restaurants, and national retail shops. Other retailers, whom he didn't name at this point in the process, have also written letters expressing interest in setting up shop in the new Fair Park complex.

A letter from the Alabama High School Athletic Association outlined its commitment to put \$500,000 toward the track in exchange for using the facility five weeks for track meets. And later, Langford said the Southern Intercollegiate Athletic Conference (SIAC) has also pledged to put \$500,000 toward the track for its meets.

"People are coming to the table wanting to be a part of this project; we didn't have to beg them to come," Langford told the councilors during a special called Committee of the Whole meeting Tuesday morning.

Those Councilors present — President Carole Smitherman, Council Pro Tem Miriam Witherspoon, Valerie Abbott, Steven Hoyt, Joel Montgomery, and Maxine Parker — all took in Langford's words with interest and apparent support.

Hoyt in particular supports the project because it's in his district. But more than that, he said, the western area project represents a huge economic benefit for other under-developed parts of the city. "This is going to be our Summit and it will have a ripple effect all across this city."

Montgomery agreed.

"What happens over there (in Five Points West) affects the entire city. So, Councilor Hoyt, I am going to support you on this," Montgomery said, with the expectation that the favor will be returned when the time comes for revitalization on his side of town in areas such as Roebuck and Parkway East.

Smitherman said the sales tax has already put about \$20 million into the city coffers, so the projected sales revenues could likely fund the project as outlined and potentially provide support to other neglected parts of the city.

Langford invited the councilors to call him with any further questions they have about the project prior to their decision on Tuesday.

Hear more comments from Langford, Hoyt and Montgomery at Birmingham View's [News Portal](#).

*Vickii Howell is the editor in chief of Birmingham View.*