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Building projects indicate economic rebound

By Eric Robinette

Staff Writer

Investments in new residential and commercial construction projects in Fairfield in 2012 reached their highest levels since the start of the Great Recession, according to city records.

Building permit valuations, which reflect the cost of a construction project when a permit is filed, hit \$30.5 million last year, according to Fairfield's annual report. Permit valuations totaled \$46.9 million in 2008, but plummeted to \$18.6 million after the recession hit. City officials said valuations have been steadily climbing each year, a sign that the economy is beginning to recover.

While residential permit valuations remained relatively flat, hovering between \$6 million to \$8 million between 2008 and 2012, commercial permit valuations went from \$10.6 million in 2009 to \$22.5 million last year.

The increase in building permit valuations has brought with it hundreds of jobs, with 390 of them coming from a single project — the Koch Foods chicken processing plant on Port Union Road. Other projects include Rolled Alloy, a metal working company that is constructing a new 65,000 square foot manufacturing facility on Thunderbird Drive, a Seward Road facility for OCS IntelliTrak, which makes overhead conveyor systems, and the Western States Machine company, which relocated from Hamilton to Fairfield.

"This gives us some sense of the investment people make ... I'm not so sure about the national economy, but we're starting to see recovery," said Tim Bachman, Fairfield's director of development services. "We have people who are making conscious decisions to reinvest in their plants in Fairfield."

Hamilton and Middletown have both seen rebounds in construction valuations as well. Middletown's valuations were \$10.4 million in 2009, but jumped back up to \$42.9 million, with the SunCoke plant, which has added more than 100 jobs to the city.

Middletown's residential permit valuations have been around \$3 million or \$4 million over the past four years, while commercial building has had a much greater dollar value attached to it. That is an indicator of a recovering economy, said Les Landen, the city's law director.

"From an economic development standpoint, it's very positive that (the numbers) seem to be climbing at a steady rate," Landen said. "That suggests there's a lot of positive economic energy here ... What that tells me is that people in the business realm are viewing Middletown as a positive place to be."

Hamilton's figures are skewed by the fact that many new schools were built in recent years. That accounts for the \$83.2 million in commercial building in 2009, when the number tends to be around \$10 million to \$17 million, said Ken Rivera, Hamilton's construction administrator.

Rivera said the numbers tell him that "the economy is steady."

"It's not declining and indications are that things are starting to move up," he said. "But with construction you never really can tell."

In Fairfield, the more optimistic feeling about the economy has contributed to the boost in commercial valuations, said Kert Radel, the president of the Fairfield Chamber of Commerce.

“When you have a feeling the economy is doing better, you do things that spark growth,” he said, adding that the city “has a really good understanding that we need to be as business-friendly as we can.”

Building permit valuations

2009 2010 2011 2012

Fairfield \$18.5 \$25.5 \$22.0 \$30.5

Hamilton \$85.1 \$9.6 \$19.1 \$18.4

Middletown \$10.4 \$17.3 \$17.9 \$42.91

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