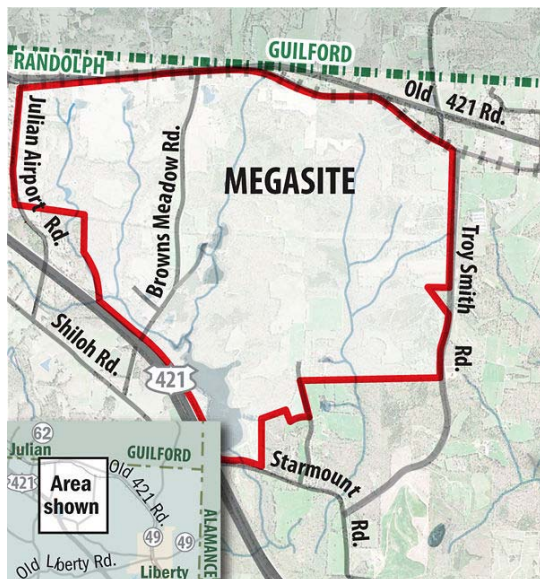


NEWS & RECORD

Toyota executive: Site for new car plant won't be chosen until 2018, so local megasite backers continue wait

By Richard M. Barron – December 5, 2017



GREENSBORO — And so we wait.

Business and political leaders are eager to know whether Toyota-Mazda will choose the Triad for North Carolina's first auto plant, but a Toyota executive says they'll have to wait a little longer.

Jim Lentz, the chief executive of Toyota North America, told the Reuters news service this week that the companies won't choose a site for their \$1.6 billion plant until sometime in the first quarter of 2018, despite rumors a decision may come before the end of the year.

"The final decision has not been made," Lentz said.

North Carolina, reported to be one of two finalists along with Alabama, can put the Champagne back on ice.

"I hope that they take the time they need to make the right decision," Greensboro Mayor Nancy Vaughan wrote in a text message. "I'm confident that we have the best location and package."

The two Japanese automakers said earlier this year that they want to build a plant that will make SUVs for Mazda and Corollas for Toyota.

The Greensboro-Randolph Megasite in Randolph County is considered by many to be the state's most attractive location for the companies.

Toyota and Mazda are reportedly asking for incentives worth \$1 billion, and some North Carolina legislators have said they would do what's needed to attract them.

“I’m happy for them to take a little extra time and for it to make sense for North Carolina,” said state Rep. Pricey Harrison, a Guilford County Democrat. “It makes sense for the company to think through what their plans are before they get everybody all excited.”

Two of the megasite’s top proponents are remaining mum as they wait for news. Neither Brent Christensen, the chief executive officer of the Greensboro Chamber of Commerce, nor Jim Melvin, the president of the Greensboro-Randolph Megasite Foundation, would comment Tuesday.

According to one expert, the automakers are likely waiting for Washington to grow quiet and state legislatures to begin their regular sessions in January.

Washington has been busy this fall with tax reform and a U.S. Senate election in Alabama pitting Republican Roy Moore against Democrat Doug Jones. That has become a high-stakes contest because of allegations that Moore dated teenage girls in the 1980s when he was an assistant district attorney.

“So much of this (Toyota-Mazda) decision has political overtones and there’s just so much going on in Congress right now,” said John Boyd, a national site-selection expert based in Princeton, N.J.

Boyd said that although North Carolina and Alabama are apparently finalists for the factory, the car companies would probably wait until other legislatures are in session in the early part of 2018 to see if a “dark horse state” might offer a surprise incentive package to sway their decision.

“The payoff is so great on a project like this,” Boyd said. “The number of jobs and high-tech nature of this project is enticing for states that haven’t necessarily opened up for these projects.”

Harrison said, however, that any incentive package requires careful consideration and that she would not want North Carolina to end up promising a package as expensive as the \$3 billion Wisconsin recently approved for Foxconn, which plans to build a \$10 billion plant to make flat screens.

If the delay assures a thoughtful decision, she said, “I can’t say that I’m disappointed because I really don’t want to see a Foxconn for North Carolina.”