

## Davidson County commissioners plan 431-acre industrial park

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The Davidson County Board of Commissioners is pushing ahead with the first phase of a long-anticipated industrial park off Interstate 85 in Linwood by acquiring 226 acres.

The county's Economic Development Commission said Friday it closed on the acres this week. About 100 acres are in hand, while the group has options on the other 126 that are likely to be acted on by Jan. 15, 2015.

The commission is conducting due diligence on another contiguous 205 acres for the I-85 Corporate Center project. Most of the land has been dairy and crop farms.

Over the past two years, the commission has secured about \$10.75 million in grants and state loans for Phase I. The financing would be used to pay for land, site preparation, infrastructure and roadway improvements. Davidson Progress is marketing the park site.

The goal is attracting advanced manufacturing, metalworking and other manufacturing companies, as well as supply chain companies, to a site that has attractive interstate and logistical advantages. Phase I will benefit from having at least 50 rail spurs for railroad cars to be restacked. The spurs have access to a switching station.

John H. Boyd, principal with site-selection consultant The Boyd Co. of Princeton, N.J., said the commissioners should be able to attract promising options for the park.

"We especially like the rail component of Norfolk Southern and NC Railroad," Boyd said. "Rail is asserting itself as an increasingly important cog in the wheel of attracting new manufacturing activities to a city or industrial park."

Larry Potts, chairman of the Davidson commission, said that acquiring the land "is the culmination of about 20 years' worth of work."

"We're hoping to offer at least four sites capable of supporting 500,000-square-foot buildings and campuses to attract at least one 1,000-plus employer."

The ultimate goal is piecing together up to 1,000 acres for park development.

"We believe this park can be a game change for the Davidson community and economy," Potts said.

Steve Gooze, the economic group's executive director, said a conservative estimate is to have 10.8 jobs created for every acre developed in the park, which would mean about 4,600 jobs if all 431 acres are secured and developed.

Gooze said that other groups involved include the landowners: Energy United; the City of Lexington;

Duke Energy; NC Railroad; and Norfolk Southern. Stimmel and Associates of Winston-Salem is involved with design aspects.

“Our community has told us that through the loss of the furniture industry jobs, they want us to diversify our manufacturing base with this park if possible,” Googe said. “There was a tremendous amount of ‘out-of-the-box’ thinking, and sometimes we weren’t sure where the box was.”

Potts said the board determined that the county’s workforce couldn’t wait any longer for the N.C. Commerce Department to bring potential projects to the park.

“The state still doesn’t seem to be sure of the direction it is taking with this private partnership it has formed,” Potts said.

“In the meanwhile, several other Triad counties have decided in the absence of (the Piedmont Triad Partnership) to pursue opportunities for themselves. We’re not counting on the state for this project, but it is our intent to work with the state when we can.”

Googe said that development begins immediately, foremost putting in sewer lines. Paved roads, building foundation pads and natural gas lines also will be part of the initial build out.

Getting those infrastructure requirements in place as soon as possible — likely eight to 12 months — is crucial to getting site selectors and their corporate clients to put the park on their radar, Googe said.

“We have had a significant level of interest and traffic in the sites,” Googe said. “The last three or four site selectors we had come in said they needed sewer and roads in place quickly for their immediate projects.

“They said they would come back once they see progress on those needs.”

The N.C. Rural Infrastructure Authority said in August that Davidson County had been approved for a \$7 million loan for the project. Another \$1.67 million came from a grant secured in December 2012.

The site had been under consideration as part of a 2,400-acre megasite for a large manufacturer, such as automotive and aviation. It was among four finalists in 2007 for a Toyota Motor Corp. plant that would make 150,000 Corollas a year.

However, with Davidson County unable to secure all the land in time, Toyota chose to build in Blue Springs, Miss.

“The megasite is on the backburner for now, but we will certainly be open to interested parties with realistic projects in mind,” Googe said.

Potts said “we want to take an onshore manufacturing approach with the interested companies. But we don’t want or expect to land the largest manufacturer.”

Boyd said the park “is especially well-positioned to capitalize on re-shoring trends, something North Carolina has seen already in projects such as Caterpillar.”

Companies that bring jobs to the United States “are prioritizing factors that tend to show well for North Carolina, especially its highly regarded workforce training initiatives, its right-to-work status, low operating costs, including property taxes, and regional access to deep water ports.”

Boyd cited that potential opportunities are in advanced manufacturing in the aviation, aerospace and avionics industries, auto-industry suppliers, and the boating and recreational-vehicle sector.

“Other growth sectors of our site-selection work are the food and beverage group, including craft beers and now craft soda,” Boyd said.

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