



New details signal Toyota battery plant at Greensboro-Randolph Megasite 'wouldn't be surprise'

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LIBERTY, N.C. (WGHP) – We have our latest signals that those plans for Toyota to open a battery manufacturing facility at the Greensboro-Randolph Megasite may be real.

The Greensboro-Randolph Megasite Foundation, in an application to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to do site work on its 1,800-plus acres near Liberty, described “an approximate 1,000-acre automotive storage battery manufacturing” facility on that site.



And John Boyd Jr., an industry insider who works heavily in the electronic vehicle segment and in North Carolina, told WGHP that he “would not be surprised in the least for North Carolina to get this trophy project.”

Boyd, the principal in the Boyd Company, a New Jersey-based site selection firm, cited the recent actions by the North Carolina General Assembly, a partnership with Duke Energy and the megasite's near-miss in 2018 to land the Toyota-Mazda plant as being key elements in the state's favor.

The Army Corps issued a public notice that it was accepting comment on that application, which was filed under the name of foundation Chair Jim Melvin and first was reported by the News & Record in Greensboro.

These developments follow a report published Friday by Bloomberg News that Toyota is favoring North Carolina as the site for its plant in a partnership with Panasonic.



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Toyota Motor North America had announced Oct. 18 that it would build such a facility in the U.S. to begin production in 2025, starting with batteries for hybrid electric vehicles. Toyota said it would invest \$3.4 billion in the U.S. through 2030, including a plan to spend \$1.3 billion for a plant that would employ 1,750.

Bloomberg's report followed the General Assembly's approval last week of a state budget that approved \$338 million toward improvements that could lure a manufacturer to the megasite and specified site development and incentives for a company that would invest at least \$1 billion and create 1,750 jobs.

The budget calls for spending about \$135 million this fiscal year for site development, \$100 million to mitigate wetlands and \$35 million for roadwork and more wetlands. There is \$185

million to reimburse the manufacturer for costs of further site work, roadwork and wetlands mitigation as needed.

Toyota had said in its announcement that it likely would name the location for its plant by the end of the year. And some industry observers have suggested that Kentucky, Texas, Missouri, Indiana and Alabama could be frontrunners.

Toyota-Mazda chose Alabama over North Carolina in 2018 largely because it already had a plant there, and critical supply-chain providers already were in place.

“Unlike prior misses [by North Carolina], the EV sector is one that requires just a small fraction of the supply of parts that go into a combustible engine,” Boyd said. “The supply chain is not nearly as much of a driver as it was on those near misses.”

The News & Record said the public notice published Friday by the Army Corps was similar to one posted for the auto plant and that it specifies a public comment deadline of Dec. 6. It lists HDR, an engineering firm with an office in Raleigh, as a partner in the project. Vickie Miller was named as the representative of the firm.

‘Success is cumulative’

Economic developers typically don’t talk openly about potential deals, and no one contacted by WGHP has spoken specifically about the idea that Toyota had made its decision.

Brent Christiansen, president of the Greensboro Chamber of Commerce and a representative of the megasite, did not respond to a phone call seeking comment.

David Rhoades, communications director for the NC Department of Commerce, wrote in an email to WGHP last week that, “regarding the proposed state appropriation for the megasite, our department frequently communicates with leaders in the General Assembly to ensure North Carolina stays competitive and in the best position to attract future economic investment opportunities.”

State House Majority Whip Jon Hardister (R-Guilford), whose district abuts the megasite, said he has not been involved directly in discussions with prospective companies but has reinforced that the state is increasingly “business-friendly” with policies that include plans to eliminate corporate income taxes in the state.

“We crafted the incentive model based on our observation on what would need to be done to attract a large manufacturing company,” Hardister wrote in an email. “We are focused on getting the site as shovel-ready as possible and demonstrating our commitment to economic development.”

State Sen. David Craven (R-Randolph) didn't respond to queries about the site, and state Sen. Amy Galey (R-Alamance), whose districts surround the site, said she couldn't comment.

Boyd cited the General Assembly's work and noted that "economic development success is cumulative. The fact that the Randolph megasite was looked at so much in 2018 might be a benefit in this project in 2021."

He also cited a partnership with "an economic development powerhouse like Duke Energy" as being an important contributor. He cited relationships the company has in place and that it was "proactive in green initiatives."

"This will be the latest economic development trophy on Gov. [Roy] Cooper's mantle," he said.

Public comments

The Army Corps' public notice is a perfunctory form that in a dozen pages specifies in detail the site and plans for it and checks off a list of requirements that must be approved by the Army Corps, such as its effect on water flow, wetlands and endangered species.

It says written comments may be submitted to the Corps of Engineers, Wilmington District, until 5 p.m. on Dec. 6. They should be sent to Andrew Williams, Raleigh Regulatory Field Office, 3331 Heritage Trade Drive, Suite 105, Wake Forest, North Carolina 27587, at (919) 554-4884 extension 26 or at <mailto:andrew.e.williams2@usace.army.mil>.

The megasite, which was developed in 2011, is a partnership among Randolph County, Greensboro and the North Carolina Railroad, which owns the property. The site has been certified by KPMG and is described as "shovel-ready."