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Greensboro under consideration for electric aircraft plant, but may be long shot

RICHARD CRAVER Lee Newspapers – October 31, 2022

Another aircraft company is considering Greensboro — likely a site at Piedmont Triad International Airport — for a manufacturing site with a workforce of up to 433 employees. The Denver Post reported on Oct. 20 that Greensboro is one of four communities in the running for Project Galvanic, an electric aircraft manufacturer with plans to build a $24.5 million plant.

However, the odds appear long that Greensboro and PTI could land the project.

On Oct. 20, the Colorado Economic Development Commission approved providing $2.95 million in job growth incentive tax credits to Project Galvanic for a site in either Centennial or Jefferson county. The jobs would pay an average annual wage of $80,014.

Meanwhile, there has been no public incentive offer to the company from either the Greensboro City Council or Guilford County Board of Commissioners.

Kevin Baker, PTI's executive director, said PTI has "no knowledge" of Project Galvanic.

The typical economic-development experience in the Triad and North Carolina is that when an incentive package gains approval at the city, county or state level, it is pretty close to a done deal.

The Gazette reported Oct. 20 that the company behind Project Galvanic has nine employees, all of whom live in Colorado.

"Project Galvanic represents the company moving from startup to production," according to a statement from the Colorado Office of Economic Development & International Trade.

"They are searching for a production facility where the building space is very specific and has significant energy considerations to support their high-efficiency motors."

Michelle Hadwiger, director of global business development for the economic development group told the commission that "this project would support the state's economic goals by adding to the density of aerospace companies in Colorado, creating high-paying jobs in aerospace, one of the most important industries to Colorado's economy."

Besides the Denver area and Greensboro, the others mentioned by the Denver newspaper as being in contention are Lansing, Mich., and Madison, Wis. An internet search for connections to Project Galvanic and those cities mostly came back to The Denver Post article and Colorado business media reports.

Being a bridesmaid?

It would make sense, however, that Greensboro and PTI would be considered, given their success in recruiting Boom Supersonic, said John H. Boyd, founder and principal with global site-selection firm The Boyd Co. of Boca Raton, Fla.

Boom is planning a $500 million "superfactory" at PTI for its Overture aircraft with at least 1,761 jobs at full production in 2030. Boom plans to hold a ground-breaking ceremony for the 400,000-square-foot facility in December.

Baker said in July that "grading is underway right now" for a planned 400,000-square-foot Boom Supersonic facility. Construction is expected to start next year, with completion expected in the second quarter of 2024.

Still, about 900 acres remain available at the PTI megasite.

The Denver newspaper reported that Bye Aerospace is Colorado's most famous electric plane maker.

The company from Centennial, Colo., has developed a training plane that allows aspiring pilots to obtain the hours they need at a much lower cost for flight time, and is also working on business aircraft that can carry more passengers.

Another possibility noted by the Denver newspaper is the XTI Aircraft Co. which is developing the TriFan 600, a hybrid electric business aircraft that can take off and land vertically on buildings like a helicopter and travel between 700 to 900 miles. It has a backlog of more than 300 orders but doesn't expect to deliver its planes until 2027.

Becoming a reality

The Associated Press reported Sept. 27 that a prototype, all-electric airplane took its first flight in central Washington state.

The Seattle Times reports that if the Federal Aviation Administration eventually certifies the small airplane to carry passengers, it could become the first all-electric commercial airplane.

The plane, built by startup Eviation, was built to carry nine passengers and up to two pilots. The company's goal is to show that such electric planes are viable as commuter aircraft flying at an altitude of about 15,000 feet.

The plane, designed by engineers in Washington state and Israel, is powered by 21,500 small Tesla-style battery cells.

Wired magazine reported in February that the aircraft industry is challenged in terms of electric aircraft by the current power limitations of lithium batteries.

If aircraft is going to go electric, Carnegie Mellon scientist Venkat Viswanathan told Wired, batteries will need a radical rethink.

Viswanathan said that even regional jets meant for relatively short hops require batteries that are light but sufficiently powerful.

“They need enough power for takeoff, then enough energy to safely cruise over long distances. It’s possible that it will never be practical — and that greener aviation will require other approaches, like hydrogen or synthetic jet fuel.”