

**From *The Pilot*, 5/29/11**

## **MegaPark Is Making Big Strides**

By [Ted M. Natt Jr.](#)

The Heart of North Carolina MegaPark, a 3,000-acre commercial and industrial park spanning Moore and Montgomery counties, has a potential anchor tenant committed to the site.

The company has not been identified publicly, but will "start off the mega-site," said Judy Stevens, executive director of the Montgomery County Economic Development Corporation.

"There's still a lot to be done, but I'm confident," Stevens said last week. "We're taking our time to do everything right."

The mega-site was announced last August after the county commissioners in each county signed a resolution of support to endorse moving forward.

Since then, a board of directors has been formed, bylaws written, nonprofit status secured from the Internal Revenue Service, a name selected, committees and subcommittees established, and marketing information placed on two websites.

"We're starting to get inquiries, so word about the megapark is spreading," said Ray Ogden, executive director of Partners in Progress. "That's great news considering that we haven't done any significant marketing."

Ogden added that the two main goals for 2011 are to develop a formal master plan for the MegaPark and have a 500-acre portion certified by the N.C. Department of Commerce.

"We're proceeding toward our next steps," he said. "I think it's moving along at a good rate. The milestones are all on schedule."

The site consists of 3,000 acres of contiguous, undeveloped land at the northwestern corner of Moore County and the eastern corner of Montgomery County. It is bounded by N.C. 24-27 and Spies Road and essentially bisected by the new Interstate 73-74, but the majority of the acreage lies in Moore County.

Still, more than one-third of the land lies in Montgomery County, so the entire park is designated Tier 1 for state incentives. That means companies

interested in locating there will receive a \$12,500-per-new-job tax credit and a 7 percent tax credit for investment in personal property.

Moore County, on the other hand, is classified at the other end of the spectrum at Tier 3 and qualifies for meager assistance from the state.

"Tier 1 is certainly an important designation for the park that enables us to reach out to businesses that otherwise may not have Moore County on their list," Ogden said.

### **Raising Awareness**

Ogden, Stevens and other board members have met with state and federal officials to help raise awareness of the park and sow the seeds for future grant and other assistance to help develop it. The build-out is projected to take at least two decades.

"We're trying to maximize our exposure," said Tim Lea, a Moore County commissioner who chairs the MegaPark board. "We've got to bring more of the stakeholders at the state and federal levels into the process. We need to take advantage of the assets that can be brought to the table."

Lea noted that the board includes "extremely talented" people from both counties who are "dedicated to the future success of this project."

Board members include First Bank CEO Jerry Ocheltree; former Lt. Gov. Bob Jordan, a principal landowner; FirstHealth of the Carolinas CEO Charles T. Frock; John May, an attorney and partner in Robbins May & Rich in Pinehurst; Randy Brodd, of Dixon Hughes Goodman; and representatives from the Montgomery County and Moore County governmental agencies involved in the project.

"I think who is on this board sends a loud message about our seriousness," Lea said. "These people have the ability to take the park to the next level."

### **Infrastructure Proceeds**

The Infrastructure Committee met earlier this month to determine how to get water and sewer to the potential anchor tenant.

"This issue needs to be resolved before developing the master plan," according to minutes from the May 6 meeting.

Committee members include representatives of all utility and transportation partners. They also decided at the meeting to form subcommittees on water, sewer and natural gas.

Russ Smitley, vice president of marketing for Aberdeen Carolina & Western Railway, said the meeting featured the type of collaboration that has enabled the project to gain immediate traction.

"The collective vision of the people involved is a very positive thing because it's not going to be a sprint. It could take several years, but this will pay big dividends over time for both counties," Smitley said.

Smitley said the regional railroad company, which connects to both Norfolk Southern and CSX freight railroads, has existing siding on the north end of the MegaPark and is already studying potential sites within the park for a rail yard.

"We've done some preliminary design work," he said.

Aberdeen Carolina & Western is also promoting the park on its website.

"We're always marketing to site consultants," Smitley said. "This project has the potential to change the paradigm of economic development recruitment in rural North Carolina."

The park will also be developed as a green, environmentally sustainable project that incorporates best practices to protect and enhance the natural environment while minimizing the use of nonrenewable resources. Specific zoning and covenants will protect on-site wetland areas and wildlife habitats, preserve natural aesthetics and promote conservation planning.

"We're working diligently and we're committed," Stevens said. "I'm very excited about how far we've come in the last year."

Lee agreed, saying, "I'm just real excited about the potential. With the mix of players involved, we're all going to benefit from this development."