

From *The Pilot*, Wednesday, July 19, 2006

## **S.P. Corporate Park Up and Running**

By Sara Lindau, Staff Writer

An initial \$4.5 million investment creating Southern Pines' first corporate business park is already adding needed new jobs and fattening the town's tax base.

The project, called "Southern Pines Corporate Park and Nature Preserve," covers 105 acres with U.S. 1 North frontage and is already master-planned.

Subdivided lots are being marketed to national and international firms. Of the 18 lots, one has already been sold, and interest has been expressed in two others.

As the only large, vacant, industrial-zoned piece of land left in town, the tract has waited many years for a nibble. Now developer and property owner Bob Baillie of RAB Investments LLC has more than nibbled -- he has happily gobbled up and purchased the entire property. In addition to private investment, financial help is on the way in the form of infrastructure financing through Community Development Block Grants through the town of Southern Pines.

The Town Council reviewed Baillie's master plan, which he submitted last week.

"It's a win-win for Southern Pines," Town Manager Reagan Parsons said. "It won't cost the town's taxpayers a dime, and it will bring needed new jobs with good pay. It will help the local economy and add tax base to the town."

Southern Pines is attractive to out-of-county and out-of-state businesses, according to broker-in-charge Susan Clift Brown, whose Clift Commercial is marketing the park nationally, targeting smaller businesses with 50 to 200 employees.

Even commercial land here is "three or four times less expensive than in Raleigh," she said, and the area offers a pleasant lifestyle.

The corporate park-preserve, located near a UPS facility, is bordered by U.S. 1, Aro Road, North May Street, and West Yadkin Road.

When built out, it could add 800 to 1,000 new jobs paying at or above the median wage, with "carefully selected, complementary community-minded companies intent on retraining and schooling new employees," Brown said in an interview.

Baillie plans a business/manufacturing subdivision, with the 18 lots ranging from two to six acres.

One "pod" is designed for six 10,000-square-foot buildings on about five acres to accommodate light manufacturing. The other lots are for larger buildings of 10,000 square feet and more. One is already spoken for by Corneal Science Corp., a "dry eye" pharmaceutical manufacturer that's expanding its operation into North Carolina from South Dakota. Its home office is already in Cary.

Other interested businesses include Pace, a worldwide manufacturer of soldering equipment, and rework tools and systems, which has signed a letter of intent to move into the park, Baillie said. A third prospect, nonprofit Pinetree Services for developmentally disabled adults, is in the preliminary talking stages for a site, Brown added.

Baillie, a Canadian who recently became a U.S. citizen, has lived here for 11 years. His residence is on Yadkin Road in the area where his corporate park is planned.

Baillie estimated investment will total \$100 million by the time the park is built out. The O'Connor Co. of Aberdeen is the exclusive contractor with RAB Investments to handle construction in the park.

The property is in a state-designated economic development zone, allowing qualified companies to apply for tax credits.

The infrastructure alone could cost \$4.5 million, including a paved entrance off U.S. 1 and internal driveway, plus concrete curbs and gutters, utilities and other basic requirements. Investments will play a part in financing the development.

### **Hearings Planned**

As for the "nature preserve" part, Baillie plans trails, benches and exercise stations for the community to use in remaining wooded areas and wetlands on the property. State environmental law requires protection of wetlands. Baillie hopes to involve a conservation land trust in maintaining the nature preserve.

At its regular meeting, which begins at 7 p.m. Thursday in the Douglass Center, the town advisory Planning and Zoning Board will hold public hearings on a request for rezoning of five acres to General Business. The change would include a day-care center and a restaurant and would allow a greenway jogging trail instead of paved sidewalks.

In August and September, the Southern Pines Town Council will hold its own hearings and take final votes on the ordinance changes allowing the project to proceed. The council will also be asked to sign off on an architectural plan.

The council is already planning to hold a required public hearing at its Aug. 8 meeting on a grant application for federal Community Development Block Grant funds totaling \$750,000 and a Rural Economic Development Center application for \$500,000 to build infrastructure.

## **An Attractive Product**

Town Manager Parsons credited Baillie, Executive Director Ray Ogden of Moore County Partners in Progress, and Partners Chairman Fred Hobbs for working together on a project that could favorably impact the area.

"Now, we have a product (corporate park) to attract new business," said Hobbs, owner of Hobbs, Upchurch of Southern Pines. Ogden worked hard to successfully compete with other counties in the Research Triangle Regional Partnership to attract Corneal, Hobbs said.

Corneal has a corporate office in Cary, said Hobbs, making the Southern Pines location convenient for its extended new light manufacturing facility and distribution area.

Moore County and Southern Pines have each agreed to reimburse Corneal up to \$10,000 for transportation expenses the company may incur in moving equipment from South Dakota to Southern Pines. The contract obligates Corneal to locate at least \$1 million in equipment here and create a minimum of 15 permanent jobs in the first year of a 10-year agreement.

Brown said Corneal has already hired 20 part-time and five full-time people to begin its local operation in temporary quarters.

Corneal alone could ultimately add 75-150 new jobs.

Baillie intends to attract "clean" industries such as packagers, distributors and light manufacturers in the pharmaceutical, technology, service and educational fields.

"The Town Council deserves a lot of credit for insisting on keeping this property with its industrial zoning in place," Hobbs said, adding: "They've been under considerable pressure to rezone it for residential or horse farm uses."

The Industrial District allows primarily light manufacturing, assembly, research and intensive commercial uses.

Sara Lindau can be reached at 693-2473 or by e-mail at [slindau@thepilot.com](mailto:slindau@thepilot.com).