

Decision Time



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After years of discussion, planning and preparation, the multi-jurisdictional park is slowly transitioning over from the drawing board to reality. Local municipalities have until April 30 to commit or walk away.

Conover sees it as an important opportunity it can't let slip by, said Conover City Manager Donald Duncan.

"It's about bringing jobs to the community in the most creative way we can," he said.

In these tough economic times, Duncan said it takes a team effort to bring in new jobs and workers to help stimulate the local economy.

Catawba County Economic Development Corp. President Scott Millar updated Conover Council members on the project during Monday night's meeting. He is also asking that each municipality determine how involved they want to be in the project by April 30, determined by the number of shares the government bodies purchase out of 100. The more money they put in, the more they benefit in tax revenues and other benefits.

The multi-jurisdictional park is intended to be a joint venture between Catawba County and its municipalities. The EDC secured 183 acres for the creation of the park off Startown Road near U.S. 321, where it hopes to entice companies to locate.

It would be the first multi-jurisdictional industrial park of its nature in Catawba County. If it's successful, Millar said more would follow.

The target market is server farms, similar to what Google has created in Lenoir. Essentially, a server farm is a building with hundreds of computer servers that store a variety of information for a business.

Millar said each share is estimated to cost about \$65,000, payable over five years. Duncan said Conover is looking at a potential investment in five or six shares in the project, at a cost of \$325,000 to \$390,000. He said that is a "doable amount" that the city can factor into the budget.

"That's what we can afford over a five-year period," Duncan said.

Meanwhile, Catawba County is looking at a 57 percent investment and Hickory and Maiden are each considering a 15-to-20 percent investment, Millar said.

Maiden's investment would be more significant than some of the larger governments in the area since it plans to provide the water and garbage services to the park, he said. The park would be located just outside Maiden town limits, in an area where Maiden already provides fire protection and limited police protection.

The potential for Conover and other municipalities to invest will depend on the investment numbers Hickory and Maiden present to the EDC by the end of April.

Even if Conover isn't given the opportunity to invest the 5 or 6 percent it wants to, Duncan said it puts the city in a better position to get involved in future multi-jurisdictional parks. The next one could even be in Conover or Claremont, among other potential sites Millar mentioned in his presentation.

It would be too expensive for any one municipality, but together, the local governments can turn the dream into a reality for the betterment of the county as a whole, Duncan said.

"I just think the main thing is we have to think outside the box during tough economic times to create jobs for folks," he said.

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