

# No hurry

## Deadline for multi-jurisdictional park participation extended

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Local governments have more time to decide how much they would like to participate in the multi-jurisdictional park.

Catawba County and its municipalities were initially told they would have until Thursday to commit to the project or walk away.

So far, Catawba County, Hickory and Maiden are the only governments that have given verbal commitment, said Scott Millar, president of the Catawba County Economic Development Corp.

"We can't go further beyond where we are until we know who the participants are," he said.

Millar said it's challenging for municipalities to give a hard figure, now with budgets yet to be finalized for the 2009-10 fiscal year. Governments are supposed to finalize the budget by June 30. He said there is some flexibility to allow gov-

ernments to wait until the budget process is complete.

In the meantime, municipalities are still considering what level of involvement they want to have in the 183-acre multi-jurisdictional park, to be located off Startown Road near U.S. 321. Millar said participants can expect to reap the benefits of the tax base and the sales tax revenues generated from the park, proportional to each government's investment.

"I think everyone realizes it would be best to have every municipality participate," Millar said.

He said the county is the only government that has requested a specific share in the multi-jurisdictional park, at 57 percent. He said Maiden has the ability to take the largest piece of the remaining 43 percent since the town is the closest in proximity to the park and intends to provide the infrastructure. However, it's unknown exactly how

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many shares Maiden intends to have in the project.

"I am very comfortable with the commitments received so far," Millar said.

Each of the 100 shares will cost a maximum of \$65,000, payable over a five-year period, Millar said. He said the preliminary figure includes all aspects of the project, including infrastructure and the cost of buying half the property if the EDC is unable to sell all of it to companies for the use of computer servers.

Millar doesn't think attracting buyers will be a problem.

"We've certainly had a good deal of traffic on the site," he said. "No one is ready to announce yet, but there are people who are interested."

He said there is no question the need is there for a data park.

"That's the key behind all of this — to develop a product we can sell to people to create jobs," Millar said.

Regardless of how much investment each government puts into the project, he said it's really a win-win for all.

"The others will be able to share in the tax and job creation benefits," Millar said.

And if they don't get in on this multi-jurisdictional park, Millar said there will be plenty of other opportunities. He said this is just the beginning.

As soon as the EDC knows which governments are in or out, Millar said the project will move forward with signage, which is already designed. He said the next step would be establishing entrance roads, a process that could begin in a few months.

The rest of the project will be completed in phases over the next few years, he said. The whole five-phase project is estimated to cost about \$6.5 million, with a first-phase price tag of about \$1.6 million.