

Focus On Energy



Written by Gina Lindsey (O-N-E Staff Reporter)

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With its goal of landing a data center in Catawba County secured with Apple, the county Economic Development Corp. is looking at a new target market.

This time the EDC has set its sights on an up and coming national trend toward alternative and renewable energy sources, said EDC President Scott Millar.

“Every community in the United States should be looking at the energy field,” he said.

The new initiative was announced during the EDC’s annual meeting held on Tuesday at the Hickory Metro Convention.

For Catawba County, Millar said the focus will be on manufacturing products that are related to alternative and renewable energy since the regional already has a strong background in manufacturing. He said it could be anything from making light bulbs to producing stents, a component in wind turbines.

Millar said now is the ideal time to focus on energy since President Barack Obama’s administration has been pushing it, and there are many opportunities for stimulus funds through the U.S. Department of Energy. He said the younger generation has realized that energy resources will be of “paramount importance in coming years.”

“We’ve got to stay ahead of what those opportunities are,” Millar said.

The county has attributes, like the Eco-Complex off Rocky Ford Road at the Blackburn landfill that the EDC can market in that area, he said. The Eco-Complex has a number of innovative projects under way, including changing methane gas captured from the landfill into energy and a bio-diesel research facility under construction.

Millar said the EDC is also looking into establishing a second multi-jurisdictional park. The organization originally planned for its first multi-jurisdictional park, located off Startown Road near U.S. 321, to host a few different data centers. However, Apple Inc. plans to use the entire 183-acre property, now referred to as the WestStar Mission Critical Data Park. Apple hopes to invest \$1 billion into the data center, which will consist of a network of computer servers to support its iPhone applications and iTunes Music Store.

The concept behind a multi-jurisdictional park is to create a collaborative effort between municipalities, which invest in the project and reap the financial and economic benefits from it.

He said it has not been determined where the next one will be, but there are several possibilities throughout the county. Millar said a site will be selected within the next few months, and depending on the specific attributes of the property, the EDC will determine what types of business it might try to recruit there.

Regardless of what the focus is for the next multi-jurisdictional park, Millar said the EDC will continue to recruit data centers. The former Carolina Mills building in Maiden already transformed into a data center shell that is ready for a company to move into with a 150,000-square-foot building on more than 100 acres.

Millar said a data center consultant recently said to him, “There’s not a chief intelligence officer in the country that can ignore the Apple/Google data center corridor now...”

He noted that the data center Apple is establishing in Maiden and Google’s data center in Caldwell County have put the region on the map worldwide.

“I do think it’s really going to pay off in a number of ways,” Millar said of Apple.

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