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## Commissioners OK plans for buying park land, incentives for Pierre Foods

By Sharon McBrayer

Catawba County got the OK from commissioners on Monday to buy property along Lake Norman to eventually build a park. The Catawba County Board of Commissioners also approved an incentive package for Pierre Foods.

Commissioners unanimously agreed to use a \$2.12 million grant from the North Carolina Clean Water Management Trust Fund to buy 589 acres along Lake Norman within the Mountain Creek area. The county will use \$150,000 already in the planning department's budget for this year for the local match required for the grant, say county officials.

The county plans to close the deal with Crescent Resources, the real estate arm of Duke Energy, by the end of the month. As part of its Federal Energy Regulatory Commission relicensing agreement, Duke Energy also agreed to provide financial assistance up to \$1.14 million to acquire the tract, according to information from the county.

The county plans to eventually develop a portion of the property for a "passive" park that would offer things such as fishing, camping canoeing, walking trails and possibly a dog park, county officials say.

Commissioner Barbara Beatty said on Monday the acquisition has been a long-time coming and is excited to see it finally happen.

Commissioners also unanimously approved an incentive package for Pierre Foods to create 500 additional jobs and retain 717 existing jobs and invest \$16.8 million. The package will be 67 percent of new tax revenues received over a five-year period, with a maximum up to \$301,098 over a five-year period.

The grant requires the company to live up to certain job and investment requirements each year. The grant also requires repayment should the investment or job creation amounts not be met, according to county officials.

The company has until Dec. 31, 2012 to create the jobs and investment requirements of the grant, said Nathan Huret, existing industry coordinator for Catawba County Economic Development Corporation. The new jobs would make Pierre Foods the fourth largest private employer in the county, Huret said.

Commissioners also unanimously approved four design issues for an expansion of the Catawba County Justice Center. The four items are combining the two buildings/projects into one instead of two separate buildings; a two-wing concept for expansion as opposed to a single structure on the front or side of the existing building; pursue shell space for future growth and a parking deck to accommodate parking requirements; and submitting a master plan to the City of Newton for zoning approval.

Commissioners questioned Finance Director Rodney Miller about additional staffing or operations that would be required after the expansion. Miller said the only possibility of new staffing might be for the sheriff's office for a security screener or courtroom bailiff. He estimated about \$300,000 additional a year would be needed for maintenance, upkeep and utilities for the Justice Center. The construction would more than double the size of the building, he said. The county spent \$352,000 in 2008-09 fiscal year for utilities, which included the jail, Miller said. In fiscal year 2009-10 the county spent \$400,000 on utilities, he said.

In other business, commissioners voted to return Kitty Barnes as the chairman and Lynn Mull Lail as the vice chairman of the board of commissioners. New board member Randy Isenhower, along with Barnes and Lail, were sworn in on Monday during the board's meeting.