

Business park finds home in Conover

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O-N-E EDITOR

Catawba County Economic Development Corporation is at it again, but this time, they are moving dirt in Conover.

The county's new multi-jurisdictional park will be located in Conover after Conover City Council unanimously approved Monday to let Catawba County EDC purchase 159 acres of land at 3660 Lai-Ber Drive and 3720 Lai-Ber Drive near N.C. 16 and Northern Drive. The property

was zoned as residential, but after City Council's meeting Monday, the property is now zoned for campus, office and institutional use.

"We have the opportunity and need to create properties to market on a very quick basis," said Catawba County EDC President Scott Millar. "The short- and long-range plan is to provide that marketable property."

The type of property Millar

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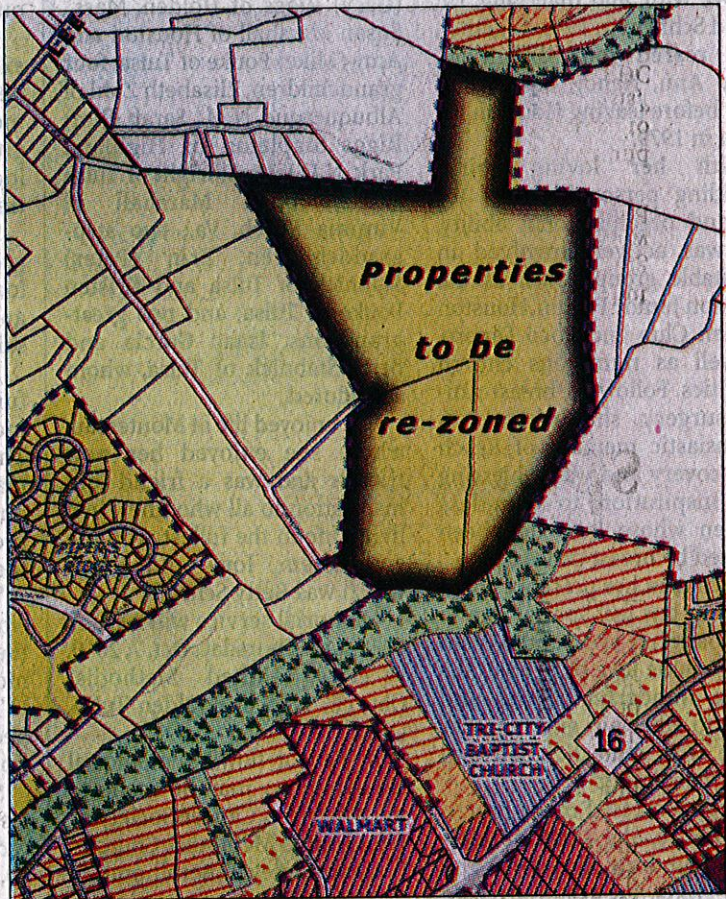


PHOTO SPECIAL TO THE O-N-E

The property highlighted to be rezoned was purchased by the Catawba County Economic Development Corporation to place a new multi-jurisdictional park in Conover.

Park

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wants to create is one that appeals to a data center.

"(The property) will be a data-center type of development," he said, "where its surrounding neighbors won't know they are there. The intent for (a data center) is not to be known. We expect and hope (the company) will be corporate."

Herman Eckard, of Mayberry Drive in Conover, expressed concern for his neighborhood during a public forum for the rezoning of the property.

"We are concerned for our neighborhood," Eckard said, adding the neighborhood is known for its quiet atmosphere.

Millar assured Eckard that there will be high security on the site if a corporate business locates to the property.

Conover City Manager Donald Duncan Jr. said a new business "will not be offensive to the neighborhood" once it locates to Conover.

By acquiring the land from Conover, Millar said that's the first step toward development of the new multi-jurisdictional park.

"(Catawba County) is accessible," Millar said, adding that if a building is already built, clients are more likely to choose it rather than starting fresh.

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**Lee Moritz Jr.,
Conover mayor**

Millar is confident the Catawba County region is appealing to data centers, and North Carolina, as a whole, is not overlooked by these large companies.

Duncan said EDC plans to build a bridge to the site, which can take nine to 12 months, depending on legalities, such as permits and rights-of-way. While waiting and seeking permits and receiving bids for construction, Millar said the property will be marketed to large companies that can bring

numerous jobs to Catawba County residents. In fact, once a company is in place to move into the facility, Millar said this creates more opportunities for grants stemmed toward job creation, which can cut costs for the county.

Conover Mayor Lee Moritz Jr. said creating regional partnerships is good business for Catawba County, which is what he thinks the multi-jurisdictional park will accomplish.

"The city of Conover greatly values our regional partnerships," Moritz said. "We have been able to partner together on water and sewer, the interbasin transfer, transportation issues, air quality and economic development. It's about economy of scale to stretch revenues. Without our regional partnerships, large scale infrastructure projects, such as a multi-jurisdictional park, would not be affordable for any one municipality."

Moritz thanked area municipalities, such as Hickory, Maiden, Catawba and Catawba County, for their support in building the new multi-jurisdictional park in Conover.

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