

Jacksonville Daily News

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Industrial park has first tenant

February 06, 2007

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Ten years after Onslow County bought land off U.S. 258 west of Jacksonville for it, the county's industrial park will have its first business set up shop there.

On Monday, the Onslow County Board of Commissioners voted 4-1 to approve an incentive development agreement with Cape Fear Precast to relocate to the N.A. Burton Industrial Park.

The company will relocate from Southport in Brunswick County and plans to construct a 20,000-square-foot warehouse and 2,000-square-foot office building on 20 acres of the 735-acre park.

The agreement sets the purchase price at \$17,500 an acre, or \$350,000. However, the company will receive a grant of \$35,000 a year for 10 straight years to recoup that cost.

Board Chairman Martin Aragona Jr. said it was satisfying to finally secure a business in the park.

County Finance Officer Alvin Barrett told the board the project would generate about \$564,000 in combined property and sales tax revenue in 10 years.

The company, which supplies precast concrete products to contractors and municipalities, will hire at least 53 workers as proposed by the company by year five. In its first year, Cape Fear plans to hire 28 employees; however, 10 of those are expected to be from current Southport staff.

During a public hearing, six people, including several Committee of 100 members, spoke in favor of the project. Nobody spoke against it.

"This is a great company to have in our community," Committee of 100 Chairman Dan Oliver said.

The lone dissenter was Commissioner Joe McLaughlin. He said the incentive package was perhaps too generous.

"My principal concern is the precedent that will be set for future tenants in that park and what price they will require before they go there," he said.

McLaughlin has long stated that he thinks the park property would be better suited for residential development.

Later in the meeting, the board voted to replace McLaughlin on the Committee of 100 with Vice chairman Paul Buchanan after McLaughlin announced he didn't want to be considered for reappointment.

In January, McLaughlin was expected to be removed from the committee due mostly to reports of disagreements between McLaughlin and both the rest of the commissioners and the committee over the industrial park.

"I think it's only fair to that organization to bring in someone who supported that effort," he said.

The county commissioners also made appointments to 23 other boards. They voted to eliminate the commissioner liaison

to the Sheriff's Department.

The board kept Buchanan and Commissioner Delma Collins on the Onslow Water and Sewer Authority board of directors and named Collins to replace Aragona on the Board of Health.

In other business, the county commissioners:

decided to further discuss a request from the Swansboro Soccer Association to advance it \$75,000 slated for the next budget year and provide an additional \$300,000 in three-year installments at a March budget workshop. The association is constructing a new soccer complex off Hammocks Beach Road.

recognized outgoing Assistant County Manager Lori Brill. She is leaving to become the new manager for Pender County. Commissioners gave her flowers and a plaque.

The next Board of Commissioners meeting is scheduled for Feb. 19.

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