

Back-office project proposed

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Some 1,000 new jobs could be created

"The labor here is fantastic, but you have no real estate to show - and by that, I mean you don't have the bricks and mortar."

King White

president, Site Selection Group

By JIMMY SETTLE

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The first major tenant of the expanded Corporate Business Park near Exit 8 of Interstate 24 could be a **call center** or back-office operation, rather than a manufacturer or distributor.

On Wednesday morning, business consultants and developers from Dallas and Cincinnati showed the Clarksville-Montgomery County Industrial Development Board conceptual drawings of a **call center** or back-office speculative building they'd like to build within the newer portion of the industrial park.

The single-story building, likely to measure around 52,000 square feet, could potentially attract back-office or satellite operations for employers such as DirecTV or Verizon Wireless, among others. As many as 500 to 1,000 new jobs paying an average of \$10 an hour could eventually be created through the venture, they said.

Mike Evans, executive director of the IDB, said the next step in the process is to specify the industrial park site for the speculative office building and negotiate the land price.

If all goes as planned, he said, construction could begin in April, and the building could be ready for a corporate tenant as early as year's end.

The IDB heard presentations Wednesday from King White, president of Dallas-based Site Selection Group, and James McCarthy, vice president of the proposed developer, Fre Resources of Cincinnati.

White said Clarksville, because of its rapid growth and skilled labor pool, consistently ranks among the most-eligible U.S. cities for back-office projects. He said Fort Campbell and Austin Peay State University are two of the leading assets that make Clarksville attractive.

However, because Clarksville doesn't have a speculative office building available for corporate scouts to see, it has consistently missing out on opportunities.

Clarksville hot, but lacks buildings

"Clarksville consistently lands among the top three, hottest prospects for this type of development. The labor here is fantastic, but you have no real estate to show - and by that, I mean you don't have the bricks and mortar.

"There are no available buildings, and these companies don't have 12 months to wait around for a building to be built before they move in," White, formerly of the regionally prominent Trammell Crow site consulting firm, told the IDB.

"You've got land available in your business park. It's strategically located in the community. It's in the path of growth," he said.

White and his consulting team have experience working with a variety of major corporate clients, he said, including most recently, Merck Pharmaceuticals.

The base investment in a spec office building as proposed for Clarksville is about \$4 million, but the total expense would reach about \$10 million, White and McCarthy said.

The team is generally looking at an estimated 10-acre site somewhere within the southeastern corner of the expanded industrial park, near Rollow Lane and Rossvie Road.

Fre Resources has analyzed more than 923 metropolitan and micropolitan communities across the nation for this project, McCarthy said.

Clarksville was identified as a finalist because of its "low **call center** saturation, Central Time zone, accessibility to Nashville International Airport, the cost of doing business here and the quality of life."

He said the plan to build a 52,000-square-foot building could be expanded over time by 25,000-square-foot increments.

Meanwhile, Evans told the board work on a separate, 108,000-square-foot spec building for manufacturing or distribution is getting under way within the older portion of the industrial park.

The project, led by Matteson-Hudson Construction Co., is targeted for Corporate Parkway Boulevard, with visibility from I-24.

Wednesday's IDB meeting began with a stern message from Clarksville Mayor Johnny Piper, who said he's concerned about the lack of new jobs being created locally, and wants to be kept closely informed of business prospect activity now that he's in the city's highest office.

Piper said he's disturbed that, even though Clarksville now has a Tennessee Valley Authority-certified industrial megasite, it doesn't appear to be among Tennessee cities that are reportedly in the running for a new Toyota Corp. plant. Chattanooga and Alamo are the Tennessee front-runners for the project, according to recent reports.

Evans told Piper the lack of rail service at the local megasite has been a drawback in Clarksville's ability to make itself more attractive to Toyota.

"I was not even aware we had applied for this project," Piper said. "Do we have a list of (companies) that are interested in Clarksville-Montgomery County?"

"The county, and the city and I are the ones that fund you (IDB)," he said, adding that a higher level of communication between the IDB and the city and county mayors' offices is needed.

County Mayor Carolyn Bowers agreed, and added that she hopes the local megasite infrastructure and rail features will be made more competitive with other industrial megasites throughout the Tennessee Valley.

"Is our megasite in as ready a condition as other megasites? We've got to get in that ballgame rather than have the state continue to shift prospects to Rutherford County or other areas," Bowers said.

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Photo Caption:

Mike Evans points out a road on a map in the Corporate Business Park expansion during an Industrial Development Board meeting Wednesday. The IDB has several new initiatives on its plate this year. Greg Williamson/The Leaf-Chronicle