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Projects are eyeing McIntosh Co. for development

For a long time, many have wondered why McIntosh County has not been able to land industrial projects when this is such a beautiful place with such great property. As McIntosh County Industrial Development Authority (IDA) President Tom Draffin related last week, he was asked that question by a prospect looking to possibly locate a project here. Draffin answered, "Because of the ports in Savannah and in Jacksonville, it was easier for the counties near the ports to develop and we are right in the middle of those two points of entry. And, it's our time and it's why we are getting the activity. Frankly, there's not as much property available along I-95 in the counties surrounding us as we have to offer here in McIntosh."

He told his board at its meeting on March 20, "So, I say to you, this project confirms that McIntosh County Industrial Development Authority is being seen in a different light by the Georgia Department of Economic Development and Georgia Power Economic Development. Does it mean we're going to get this project? It doesn't necessarily mean that. It just



IDA President Tom Draffin, right, shows his board at the March 20 meeting a possible proposal of a comprehensive plan for infrastructure needed for Tidewaters East, with 243 acres.

means we're somebody that they're willing to turn to more than they have been in the past."

Draffin discussed nine projects in the work session of the meeting, with board members Chris Harper, Cliff Sowell, Byron Vaught, Nancy Cobb, Sam Oliver and James McKinzie in attendance.

The project Draffin was discussing would need 70 to 95 acres, would employ 300-plus, and would have a most sophisticated automation using cutting-edge AI. It would require 2.4 mega-

watts of energy a day.

Other project proposals include a proposed 10-acre concrete plant and a 10-acre property for a distribution warehouse.

One project fell through because it was an Asian company and there is a pending U.S. regulation that forbids an Asian company to operate within a certain number of miles of a military facility, here being the Bombing Range. However, the Bombing Range has not been officially classified as a military facility for military tax incentive purposes

with the bid package out for all the work and a permit approved. Also, the board is awaiting bids to change a six-inch water line to a 12-inch line in the main park, to alleviate water pressure issues.

A sewer allocation agreement has been completed with the City providing for sewer capacity of 75,000 gallons per day for two years in return for a payment of \$25,000 to the City.

Approved was a budgeted pay-down of \$100,000 on a wetlands mitigation loan that matures on March 25.

Work continues with the City to put in a pre-application for GEFA funding for upgrades to the sewer system. Draffin said, "What the pre-application does is put us in line for consideration in next year's budget, which is where we want to be. Based on the projects we're seeing, one of our highest priorities is to work with the city and obtain the improvement of our sewer system, particularly if we get one of these projects that will bring over 100 employees in."

IDA continues to work on reapplying for a Rural Site Infrastructure Development

Grant, which it didn't receive last year; which requires a large amount of work to accomplish Georgia Ready Acceleration Development (GRAD). Draffin reported numerous required reports are complete, but a comprehensive plan must also be submitted.

Draffin showed the board a possible proposal of a comprehensive plan for infrastructure needed for Tidewaters East with 243 acres, showing it accommodating two 400,000 square foot buildings, two 100,000 square foot buildings and a 300,000 square foot building.

House Bill 532 has passed the House of Representatives, thanks to the help of Rep. Buddy DeLoach, and is under consideration in the Senate, for counties with 20,000 or more acres of unimproved real estate owned by the Department of Natural Resources. It would allow those counties to receive funding from more than one source.

In committee reports, Cobb said work is underway to create a job description to begin the search for a new president of the IDA, as Draffin intends to retire by the end of the year.

because of the limited personnel on site. Nevertheless, because the issue was present, the prospective company decided to focus its interest elsewhere.

Project Cold, a cold storage facility, bought property earlier this year in Tidewaters East, is supposed to announce a groundbreaking in the near future. The facility is planning to open by April 1, 2026, the company says.

Draffin reported work has begun on the spine road in Tidewater's East for which it has received a One-Georgia Equity Fund grant,