

Gibson City a finalist for company's 'green' plant

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GIBSON CITY – The "green" business that has picked Gibson City as one of two finalists for a factory site is Eco Manufacturing of Cambridge, Mass.

Garrett Gates, vice-president of business development for Eco Manufacturing, said this week that the potential site of a plant would be on Gibson City's west side, along Illinois 9 and just south of Jordan Industrial Park. Eco Manufacturing has been looking at various sites for about two years and at Gibson City for one year. A Tennessee site is also "still in the running," Gates said.

The company plans to build a plasma gasification recycling facility, adapting technology originally developed by Westinghouse to test the heat shields of re-entry vehicles for NASA, Gates said.

Gates said the extremely high heat will safely process containerized industrial waste into materials to be reused in construction, water that mostly will be reused by the plant itself, and a synthetic gas the company hopes to sell to neighboring industries at a cheaper price than natural gas.

"This technology has the capability to transform the waste industry," Gates said.

A news release from Mayor Dan Dickey said the business would offer "30 to 50 green jobs," and "the average salary will be approximately \$50,000 plus benefits."

"Exciting synergies also exist with several Gibson City businesses that would likely decrease their energy costs," Dickey said in his news release.

Gates said plants using similar technology are operating successfully in various locations worldwide, including Japan and Canada. He also said a similar process is being used near Detroit to "melt down" car engines.

The "green" jobs would fit in well with other existing industries in Ford County, according to Diane Johnson, executive director of Ford County's Community and Economic Development Foundation.

"This is exactly the type of industry we were looking for," she said, "because it fits well into our vision of Ford County being on the leading edge of the 'green' industry.

"If you look at Ford County, we have nine wind farms in various stages of development. We have the ethanol plant (in Gibson City). We have the only solar-powered drive-in movie theater in the country. We have solar streetscape lamps in Paxton which I don't know of any town in the area that has that. And then we have Stelle, in northern Ford County that has been running sustainability programs for well over 30 years and now has become a regional resource for sustainability programs."

The mayor said initial contact with Eco Manufacturing came about after he participated in training at Decatur led by Ameren and then entered local information into an economic database of communities.

Dickey felt the company's ideas exhibited present and future potential, and he decided to put together a special task force of community members and economic development officials to explore its potential.

"The mayor and some of those other people really work hard on making contacts," Johnson said.

Meanwhile, the county economic development foundation was able to provide some funding to have officials from the company fly in to talk to local officials, Johnson added.

Johnson said she would expect the land involved for the site of the plant to be included in a tax-increment-financing district.

"The land's not in a TIF yet, but I believe that may be one of the few local concessions made," Johnson said.

Johnson said she thinks the possibility of landing the plant will benefit all of Ford County.

"This thing in Gibson, it's going to be a good thing for them. And anything new and positive has also got to be a plus for the entire area," Johnson said.

More details of the project were scheduled to be announced during a news conference at 4 p.m. today in Gibson City.

Representatives from the company and related technology experts will be present at the news conference, as will state Sen. Dan Rutherford, R-Pontiac, state Rep. Shane Cultra, R-Onarga, and a representative for U.S. Rep. Tim Johnson, R-Urbana, the release said.

Paxton Record Editor Will Brumleve contributed to this report.