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JOBS & ECONOMY

Preble County plant would bring 140 jobs

Construction incentives OK'd for Pratt to build plant in Lewisburg.

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Staff Writer

LEWISBURG — Plans to build a new 350,000-square-foot, \$13 million manufacturing plant in Preble County took a major step forward Monday, with the board of the Warren County Port Authority approving a deal for construction incentives for the project.

The state and local governments are lining up a series of tax incentives to win the project by Pratt Industries Inc., a Georgia-based maker of recycled paper and packaging. If it's built in the Preble County village of Lewisburg, it is expected to create 140 new jobs and be a "state-of-the-art" manufacturing facility.

Pratt Industries is eyeing 37.9 acres of property in Lewisburg, close to Interstate 70, for construction of the manufacturing plant to produce raw corrugated material. Estimates are that the total investment would be more than \$13 million.

However, Preble County and Ohio are in competition for the Pratt Industries project with other sites in Indiana, Kentucky, Illinois, and Michigan, according to state development records. The project is not yet a done deal for Ohio, said Shawnda Combs, economic development director of Preble County Development Partnership Inc.

Ohio is awaiting word on a final decision from the company about what place it will pick to expand, but Combs said she's confident about Preble County's prospects.

"You really could not ask for a better project with both the company, a state-of-the-art manufacturing plant and the level of job creation," Combs said.

Officials with Pratt Industries could not be reached Monday for comment.

The port authority board at its meeting Monday approved a resolution authorizing the authority to enter a ground lease and project lease with Pratt Industries. Under the agreement, Warren County would have an ownership interest in the land and the building, said Martin Russell, Warren County economic development director and executive director of the port. The agreement authorizes the company to build the plant southeast of the corner of Clay and Main streets, and once construction is complete, convey the property to the county agency.

The port authority would in turn lease the building to Pratt Industries for 10 years.

The port authority, a county government agency, and Preble County Development Partnership, a nonprofit economic development agency, in the last month reached a cooperative agreement for economic development. Preble County does not have a port authority.

The benefit of the port authority leasing the building to the company is that the port authority is exempt from paying sales taxes for construction materials, Russell said. The savings would lower the cost of construction.

Also, Pratt Industries would pay a fee to be split between Warren and Preble counties. Russell said that is money the local governments would not receive without the port authority's involvement and would go to help fund other development activities in both counties.

Similar lease/build arrangements are in place for the FedEx Ground sorting center that opened this year in Lebanon, and the Miami Valley Gaming racino under construction now in Turtlecreek Twp. slated to open in December.

"This allows Preble County to offer a significant inducement," Russell said. "Any time that you can have a company solidify their roots in your backyard, that's a good day."

The same Pratt Industries project was approved July 29 by Ohio Tax Credit Authority to receive a 65 percent, 10-year Job Creation Tax Credit, an income tax abatement. If the project moves forward here, the company is committed to create 140 new jobs over three years to receive the financial incentives, according to details of the state agreement.

Lewisburg approved local incentives.

Pratt Industries owns Lewisburg Container, the village's largest employer and one of Preble County's top 10 employers, Combs said. Lewisburg Container, which makes corrugated cardboard packaging materials and other cartons, has 293 workers, Combs said.

The new plant could produce material to supply Lewisburg Containers and other area companies that convert raw paper rolls to different types of packaging.

The new project on the table with Pratt is from a different division in the parent company than Lewisburg Container, Combs said. It would be a net new investment, not a consolidation of Pratt Industries' existing facilities in Lewisburg, Springfield or Mason, she said.

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