

Laydown yard gains steam as turbine parts are delivered

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Transportation Partners & Logistics has completed an east laydown yard for blade staging at Great Plains Industrial Park. The company receives wind turbine parts on railroad and then trucks them to wind energy firms.

Courtesy photo

The Great Plains Development Authority board received an update Thursday regarding property in the Great Plains Industrial Park.

Property manager Tim Peoples spoke about Transportation Partners & Logistics, the company that located within Great Plains last year. TP&L transports wind industry components from the manufacturers to a point of storage for the wind energy companies building power installations within a few hundred miles.

Peoples reported TP&L has completed its east laydown yard for blade staging.

“They are actually in the process right now of designing a staging area for loaded blade trucks along Scott Road,” Peoples said. “Trains are moving pretty consistent right now, about two to three per week. Trucks are currently hauling to the Neosho Ridge project and North Ridge project and they will be starting hauling to the Kings Point project in the next two to three weeks.”

Park director Brad Reams showed the board an overhead photo of the expansion of the company’s laydown yard.

“We are even getting parts trucked up from Texas and in from Colorado as manufacturers try to get their parts out to different laydown yards, so they, and developers as well, can get the tax credit that ends in 2021. It’s in their best interest to get as much as they can out of their factories and on the ground and in safe harbor so they get their tax credit, so we are seeing a lot of push to get that inventory out of the manufacturers and into the hands of developers or laydown yards. That is good for us in it just causes the need to expand the laydown site.”

Reams said he was watching as the construction company that worked on the original TP&L laydown site used cement injection to firm up some of the storage areas.

“That’s an interesting process to see. It’s not something you see every day,” Reams said. “We are very excited about the progress at the laydown yard and how things are expanding.”

Growth in the TP&L site wasn’t the only good news. Reams told the board Great Plains has worked on about 32 projects with potential lessees in the last eight months since he began in his position.

“I think we are being pretty active,” Reams said. “We haven’t slowed down working on those projects during COVID-19.”

Reams mentioned several companies he is working with to discuss terms on memorandums of understanding and/or leases.

Grant

The board also heard about potential grant funding being made available through the U.S. Department of Commerce's Economic Development Administration.

Great Plains project manager Becky Dantic said about \$1.5 billion in grants are being made available through the Public Works and Economic Adjustment Assistance Program "to help prevent, prepare for and respond to the coronavirus."

Great Plains plans to apply.

"We're still working through what the actual project details will be and what the total will be," Dantic said, explaining grants are funded between 80% and 100%, requiring some to make a 20% match. "We may not have to pay anything. It depends on the need."

"It is an extremely competitive application process, so we're going to work hard to make sure we're putting forth the right story about why we need it here and why Great Plains is the right place to kind of help prepare for and work through things that came out of this pandemic — issues with the PPE (personal protective equipment) and getting it distributed, and some of those types of things."

Dantic said Great Plains could serve as a central hub for distribution, if funding is made available for storage upgrades and additional road, rail and water distribution improvements.

They have not worked out all the details yet, she said, but they hope to submit a grant application within the next 30 days.

"Some things we have done in preparation for this is, we had some groups in this week to look at our warehouses to advise us on what would be ideal as far as improvements, layouts for storage," Reams said. "Then we have talked to people who would be producers of PPE locally. We have a group that would be doing the selling of the PPE through an online portal. They already have contracts with 11 states. So we are aligning ourselves with a group that would allow us to act and react in this process."

"... We believe we have built a network where it will be stateside PPE production and it will be

easily distributable from the center of the United States by both rail and truck if not air, so we can react quickly and plus it is a secure facility," Reams said. "We even explored using igloos (storage units) for that type of storage if needed. And we talked to another contractor about refrigerated storage for vaccine, if that needed to happen.

"So it's a good effort. I don't think it is just lip service. I think we will take the steps to talk to the state as well as FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency). We have a representative with our selling group that has been doing a lot of the government contracts, so we will look to them for advice as to what these governmental organizations are looking for in the way of storage — quantities and quality. That will help drive what we submit as well."

Board member Montie Taylor asked if either Dantic or Reams could put a dollar amount on what they think the EDA might award in a grant so the board could get an idea of what Great Plains might have to match if they were required to pay 20%.

Dantic said they have not put a budget together yet to see what it might look like. She said when sending in the application, Great Plains is not guaranteeing matched funds would be available until the grant amount is known, so that the park is not locked into anything financially.

Reams said they think they have some numbers for road and rail improvements already, but the warehouse visit was only Wednesday and they do not have costs developed for those improvements. Figures for water improvements remain to be figured, too.

Reams said the grant request minimum is \$100,000 and the maximum is \$30 million.

"We obviously wouldn't do anything that was budget damaging, but we truly believe if you are going to do this kind of activity, you will definitely have to have rail rehabilitation and road rehabilitation as well," Reams said.

"It's a good opportunity," board president Bob Wood said. "A good possibility."

Reams reminded the board that there is a caveat in the way the grant application is written. If an organization states it cannot meet the 20% match, there is a possibility for 100% funding of the grant. Board members agreed that sounded like the way to go.

In other business, the board:

- Heard the one-year inspection of a water tower that was blasted and repainted found the work to be in good condition and ready for use.
- Heard fencing contractors hired by the Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism relocated a fence by the TP&L area to the south side of the tracks, enabling the park to secure a cattle lease on that property.
- Heard Great Plains received a letter of noncompliance from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers regarding the river dam. A March 23 inspection found protruding rebar through the concrete where Great Plains had added fill in 2015. Peoples said the dam should be in compliance within the next month as it only requires some trimming.
- Approved up to \$20,000 for repair/replacement on the low-lift pump at the water treatment plant.
- Heard the 2019 audit has been delayed because the auditor was behind on work due to COVID-19.
- Appointed Reams and Becky Dantic to the Grow Labette advisory board.
- Heard the majority of the Department of Commerce rail project has been wrapped up. The project cost \$1.8 million. Great Plains' out-of-pocket expenses for the project were \$184,000. Great Plains had budgeted for \$200,000.
- Heard Tim Ren retired April 9 from working the security at the entrance to Great Plains. The board hired JoBeth Kendall on March 31 to replace him and hired Mark Platt of McCune as a seasonal maintenance worker to help with mowing and brush clearing.
- Heard the plant awarded a new sanitation contract to SEK Sanitation starting June 1.