

Activity picks up at Great Plains

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OSWEGO — Activity and interest at Great Plains Industrial Park is growing and a utility has agreed to bring natural gas lines to fringe areas of the park if prospects agree to move into the park, Labette County commissioners heard Monday.

Brad Reams, Great Plains park director, and Tim Peoples, property manager, discussed the park with commissioners.

Peoples said the \$1.8 million railroad improvement project is nearly complete and the railroad will be inspected on Monday. The first shipments of wind turbine parts are expected to arrive by rail on Feb. 10 for storage at the park. The company storing the materials will then ship them out by truck to wind farm sites.

He told commissioners that the railroad going through the former Kansas Army Ammunition Plant needed attention, as did two bridges, both of which were rebuilt in the project. The bridge deck on the south bridge was in poor condition and had shifted 2 feet to the south, Peoples said.

“Running empty cars across it was pretty risky even the way it was,” Peoples said.

He said the railroad beds were rebuilt from the ground up and they look “gorgeous” now. The project included replacing more than 6,000 railroad ties, 16 switches and 1,200 feet of rail coming into the park off the Union Pacific Railroad switch. Work included repacking and re-bedding more than 8 miles of rail. He said the Union Pacific used to back up railcars to the park’s switch that was outside of the park boundary because the U.P. did not want its trains on the S curve inside the park. Now the U.P. will be able to bring engines 1,200 feet into the park boundary with the improved rails.

A U.P. official visited the park and checked on the railroad project.

“They were just thrilled with the way it looks,” Peoples said.

Reams said the rail improvements will improve the marketability of the park and a U.P. official told him the railroad would make the park one of its preferred sites.

“He’s been very frank about he was not really willing to promote us as a site before and now he is,” Reams said.

Reams added that an official working in rail logistics visited the park unsolicited.

“We’re starting to see people that are searching us for logistics hubs. They’re seeking our site out.”

TP&L will operate a staging area for the wind farm industry at Great Plains. It can ship materials to wind farm projects in Missouri and Arkansas from the Great Plains park. TP&L is on a 20-acre tract now and is planning to expand its footprint.

Reams said he’s looking at using the 1400 area for warehousing for short-term contracts. He’s had some nibbles on that idea, he said.

He has a memorandum of understanding from another prospect that he hopes to make public in the future. He said Great Plains also submitted paperwork for another Kansas Department of Commerce project for a biotechnology manufacturing facility that would create 100 jobs and see a \$165 million investment.

Reams said he is considering sites in the 100 area for that project because it would be near a water tower on the ground and the facility would require natural gas. There are no gas lines through the plant property but Reams said the gas company has said it would install lines in that area of the park to help that prospect.

“So that’s a big step for us,” Reams said.

“That’s a huge step,” Commissioner Doug Allen said.

Reams said the gas company would come into the plant from Rooks Road and 24000 Road and hook into the project.

He said there are a lot of projects in the pipeline. Great Plains also would like to see industrial hemp grown in the park.

“I think our biggest challenge going forward is creating the revenue to be able to absorb the

costs required by the MOA," he said, referring to the agreement with the Army that requires the park to share revenues. The Army mandates payments and revenue shares between 25 and 50% through 2023.

Reams said the park staff and board are working through Sen. Jerry Moran's office to attempt to renegotiate with the Army.