

County plans \$6.5 million industrial park

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Campbell County Commissioners are planning to lure businesses into the area by developing a \$6.5 million business-ready industrial park.

The commission spoke with staff from PCA Engineering on Tuesday about plans to develop an industrial park on county land southeast of Cam-plex and immediately east of the new Gillette College Rodeo and Agricultural Complex. Commissioners bought the nearly 250-acre plot from Wyodak Resources Development Corp. in 2014 for about \$535,000.

The land will be used to develop basic building shells that businesses could quickly move into, Commissioner Micky Shober said after the meeting. The commission favors the project because the county needs more economic development.

“I’ve heard we’re energy dependent as long as I can remember,” Shober said about the county’s economy. Diversifying the industrial base has “been something that’s been needed in Gillette for a long, long time. I think the timing is right for it.”

Production or manufacturing business that pay well for skilled labor would be ideal, especially if the coal mines downsize, Shober said.

“If you think there will be a slow decline in coal production, you need to diversify our economy,” he said.

Shober said call centers or similar businesses won’t work because those industries don’t pay enough.

“It’s got to be a high-paying job. I’m OK if they make bullets or bombs there,” he said referencing a gun factory.

The park wouldn’t compete with private industry because there aren’t parcels large enough in town, Shober said.

“If someone comes here, we want them to look at the private side first, we would be the second choice,” he said. “I will not tolerate government competing with private industry, and there’s no way, shape or form this is ever intended to be that.”

Other cities, like Cheyenne, have been successful in attracting businesses with similar offerings, Shober said. The reason is because businesses looking to start or relocate don’t want to wait for buildings constructed or permits and zoning issues to be resolved.

The project will be built in phases, and roads will need to be created and utilities brought in before building pads and shells could be constructed, Shoher said.

The development option commissioners favor calls for building a road between the dirt bike race tracks off Highway 51. Another road would extend east, connecting the industrial park to the current end of Boxelder Road.

If everything were built according to PCA's plan, the cost would be about \$6.5 million.

The project would be grant funded and the county would need to match about 15 percent of it, or \$975,000. However, Shoher said the grant guidelines allow the value of the land to be put toward the match.

In essence, the commission would spend about \$440,000 for a \$6.5 million industrial park.

Phil Christopherson, CEO of Energy Capital Economic Development, has already applied for a \$34,000 grant to fund planning of the project.

If approved, a plan would be created and Christopherson said he would then apply for a \$1.5 million community readiness grant. He would continue applying for the grant as the project progressed.

Christopherson said he plans to apply for the larger grant in June or September and will do so even if the planning grant is not approved.

Because the community readiness grant encourages business and is of a higher priority, Christopherson said he is optimistic it will be approved.