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News - Local / Metro
 Friday, Aug. 07, 2009

Research park planned on Shop Road

Parcel had been slated for farmers market

By JEFF WILKINSON - jwilkinson@thestate.com

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Richland County and the S.C. Research Authority want to turn land once pegged for a new state farmers market into a high-tech industrial park.

The 196-acre park at Shop and Pineview roads would include 146 acres that the county purchased and deeded to the state for a farmers market that eventually went to Lexington County.

The state and the county last week settled their lawsuit over the land, with the SCRA receiving 110 acres and the county 36.

The county bought the 196 acres along Pineview Road for \$4.55 million and deeded all but the 50 acres to the state for the new market. The state said it spent \$2.5 million clearing and improving the property.

But the plan to put a market in the site failed because it wasn't supported by the large, wholesale vendors, who said monthly payments to buy buildings there would be too high.

So the state chose a plan by private developers to build a 175-acre market in Lexington County.

Although it might appear the county came out poorly on the deal, Richland County administrator Milton Pope said the creation of new property taxes from the park and new jobs for Lower Richland tipped the deal for the county.

"Any place in the county where we can create wealth we want to do that," he said. "And Lower Richland has been a focus point of the council."

That land will be coupled with 50 acres of adjacent, county-owned land to form the park.

SCRA chief executive Bill Mahoney said the park is intended for larger manufacturing firms and would complement, rather than compete with the University of South Carolina's Innovista research campus and the Carolina Research Park on Farrow Road, which it also owns.

Innovista, Mahoney said, would focus on "clean production environments" for firms specializing in areas such as software and research.

The Shop Road park — which is nearly five miles northwest of the S.C. State Fairgrounds — would be "more about manufacturing firms that require a heavier industrial site."

And he noted that only 26 acres of the suburban, 246-acre Carolina Research Park are still available.

The Shop Road park would be the top of an economic ladder that would begin with small business incubators and then move to larger incubators with limited manufacturing capacity — such as the SCRA "Innovation Center" going into a former warehouse at Assembly Street at Catawba Street in Columbia.

A company then would grow into Innovista or move to the Shop Road technology park, depending on its needs.

"Innovista represents the brain trust" between researchers and entrepreneurs, said Richland administrator Pope. "But then you are going to need manufacturing space."

While the park also settles what was a sticky and contentious lawsuit between the state and the

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county, many small vendors have been unhappy with the new plan and have asked Richland County to renew efforts to have a market near the old one.

They have advocated starting a farmers market on the old Boozer Lumber Co. land on Atlas Road.

Pope said he will be gathering information on the site while County Council is on its month-long recess; but any move forward "would have to be a council policy decision," he said.

Mahoney said it would take \$1 million to \$2 million to improve its portion of the Shop Road property with curb and gutter and other infrastructure for the park.

He said the authority would pay that from revenues from its other investments.

The authority was formed in 1983 with a one-time legislative grant of 1,400 undeveloped acres and \$500,000. The non-stock, tax-exempt company has been self-sustaining ever since.

Mahoney said once work begins — a date still not determined — it would take 12 to 18 months to get ready for the first tenant. He added the authority has no tenant leads at this point.

Pope said the cost of developing their portion of the park would not be determined until a master plan is completed, and no timetable has been set for that planning.

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 **Higher_Ground** wrote on 08/07/2009 03:23:02 PM: "The Shop Road park — which is nearly five miles northwest of the S.C. State Fairgrounds — would be "more about manufacturing firms that require a heavier industrial site."

umm someone needs to learn how to read a map. The proposed park would be *Southeast* of the fairgrounds. Northwest would put it downtown...

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 **yellowhouse** wrote on 08/07/2009 08:56:31 AM: Columbia needs more industrial space, so I think this is a good move, especially since that area is already somewhat industrial. Manufacturing companies are investing in both Greenville and Charleston, so maybe Cola can get a piece of that pie. Anything that has the potential to attract jobs is a good thing.


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Plant some trees.

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 **jdogle1** wrote on 08/07/2009 07:42:08 AM: It's interesting that no one from USC has a comment in this article. Sounds like Richland County is going forward on a lot of assumptions.

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 **brianonthescene** wrote on 08/07/2009 00:17:55 AM: I love how this is being justified by putting it into the context of some kind of feeder system that ties in with Innovista, as if that actually exists.

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