



October 15, 2010

Titusville still in running for U.S. jobs grant

City faces stiff competition

*BY DAVE BERMAN
FLORIDA TODAY*

City officials this week put the finishing touches on a grant application they hope will bring hundreds of high-paying manufacturing jobs to Titusville.

But Titusville knows there will be plenty of competition for a share of the \$35 million in federal economic development grants aimed at helping the region cope with the end of the shuttle program and the loss of thousands of high-paying jobs.

The grants were recommended by President Obama's space task force, a panel of Cabinet secretaries and agency chiefs tasked with helping the Space Coast diversify. The deadline for applying is today.

Winners could be notified in January, although the program still depends on Congress appropriating the money.

Titusville, which will be among the Space Coast communities hardest hit by the shuttle program's end, wants a \$4.8 million grant so it can build a 45,000-square-foot plant on city-owned land off U.S. 1, near Space Coast Regional Airport. The plant would be leased by a manufacturer that promises to bring 300 jobs to the area if the complex is built.

If the unidentified "clean technology" company locates on the 4.93-acre site, City Manager Mark Ryan said, it could directly and indirectly lead to 636 other jobs for the area.

"If it comes through, it will be great for Titusville," Mayor Jim Tulley said.

The grants won't go to individuals or directly to companies. But educational institutions, governmental entities and private companies working in cooperation with a state or local government are eligible to apply.

Also, the grants aren't limited to the Space Coast. Entities as far away as Pinellas County on Florida's west coast can submit applications.

Palm Bay has applied for part of the grant to assist with a \$5.5 million road relocation and park improvement project in the western part of the city.

Another local entity vying for money is the Titusville-Cocoa Airport Authority, which submitted three applications, related to business expansion proposals at its Space Coast Regional Airport. According to letters of support from the Titusville City Council, those projects have the potential to create a total of more than 1,000 jobs. Here are the details of the proposals, according to the support letters:

- Helping Gryphon Group Security Solutions LLC, a national security expert, to design and construct a new headquarters and training facility at the airport.

Gryphon already has Brevard County operations on U.S. 1, just north of Melbourne, and employs 45 people locally with an average salary of \$56,000.

The company wants to consolidate and expand its training facilities at one location, either in Brevard County or in Scotland County, N.C.

If it selects Brevard, that would mean 266 more jobs for the area, indirectly through local vendors.

The company trains the military, employees of federal agencies, protective drivers and executive protection agents. Its clients include the United Nations, the World Bank and various Fortune 500 companies.

The proposed 15,000-square-foot facility would be built on a 40-acre site within the airport's industrial area and would include a 360,000-square-foot asphalt driving surface. The proposal calls for Gryphon to sign a 30-year lease to use the site.

- Developing a perimeter road and other improvements to accommodate a runway extension that could handle larger aircraft.

The improvements could encourage Advanced Aero to relocate its light sport aircraft manufacturing there.

That would create up to 200 jobs by 2015 to manufacture the two-seat planes, and an additional 200 to 300 jobs between 2016 and 2018 for the development of a four-passenger light jet.

- Assisting NewSpace Center LLC in its previously announced plan to locate and develop Interspace, a space-themed attraction, on about 74 acres of leased airport property.

The grant would be used for water and sewer improvements on the site, as well as an access road, so that NewSpace Center can construct a 70,000-square-foot building with room for a 60,000-square-foot expansion, in addition to 300 parking spaces.

Future project phases could include an industrial park zoned for research, development and light manufacturing, in addition to a hotel, retail space, a restaurant, a conference center and the option for a branch college or university campus.

In all, the project could account for more than 300 jobs by 2012.

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Additional Facts

How it works

Types of projects: Should fit into a category of aviation/aerospace, clean technology, homeland security/defense, information technology or life sciences.

Project review: The U.S. Department of Commerce Economic Development Administration office in Atlanta will review applications. Then senior officials from NASA, the U.S. Small Business Administration and the U.S. Department of Labor will evaluate the applications for goals such as job creation and serving economically distressed communities. The Atlanta office's regional director will choose the winners based on the panel's recommendations and depending on the money available. --

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