

Lawmakers Say NC Weighed For CAT Site

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RALEIGH, N.C. (AP) — A Brunswick County industrial park is being scouted as a site for a Caterpillar Inc. factory that could employ more than 1,000 people to make small excavators and tractors.

Legislators and local officials briefed on the potential new employer have been told the project involves Caterpillar, said Rep. Dewey Hill, D-Columbus, whose district includes the industrial park being considered.

"In fact, that's pretty well-known," said Hill, who has not spoken to the company.

Word that North Carolina could be in good position to land the Caterpillar plant being relocated from Japan came last week. The Associated Press reported that Caterpillar emailed Illinois officials, telling them the factory needed ocean port access and the company had "defined a very tight search area" close to a division headquarters in Cary, but no necessarily in that city.

Caterpillar hasn't shared any plans to locate in the Raleigh suburb with the Cary Chamber of Commerce, chamber vice president Sandy Jordan said.

Company spokesman Jim Dugan declined to describe which states near the Cary division headquarters might be considered for the factory. Caterpillar plans to announce the location by April 1, start construction in the middle of next year, and be at full capacity in four to five years.

Gov. Beverly Perdue met over breakfast late last month with executives of an unnamed company she said was considering bringing 1,100 jobs to Brunswick County, her office said. State economic development officials are prohibited by law from discussing pending plans.

Hill helped instigate a 2009 change that designates the International Logistics Park for the most generous job-creation incentives that North Carolina offers in state law at \$12,500 per job.

North Carolina officials can add millions of dollars in additional incentives to attract a big employer, but the law requires that those only be used to sway a company also considering locations outside the state.

The site is on a four-lane highway that leads directly to the Port of Wilmington 10 miles away and boasts some of the state's lowest property taxes.

Rep. Danny McComas, R-New Hanover, said he spoke with Caterpillar weeks ago and talked up the Wilmington port.

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"It offers everything that hopefully they need," he said. The company would be unlikely to put much stock in an idea now being studied over whether to build a new port near Southport that could accommodate a new generation of super-sized cargo ships.

"I don't think Caterpillar will even take that into consideration. They're going to make a major investment and they're going to need a return. I would think they're looking for a quick payback," McComas said.

Caterpillar already employs about 2,000 in North Carolina, including factories in Winston-Salem, Sanford and Clayton.

Caterpillar announced earlier this month that the Clayton plant will add almost 200 jobs over five years and will be its global production site for several models of small-wheel loaders. The company is adding 300 jobs by 2014 to its Sanford plant, where it builds tight-turning skid loaders used in landscaping and construction.

Caterpillar in November opened its Winston-Salem plant, where it will employ about 500 once it's at full production in two years. The factory builds axles for massive mining equipment in high demand as international markets expand. Factory expansion needed to meet demand has been in the works at several U.S. plants, and in China and Brazil.

Former Caterpillar chairman and CEO James W. Owens is a trustee of the North Carolina State University, where he earned three degrees including a doctorate.

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