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A 5,000-acre vision in Union

County group sees a park merging business, industry and education with up to 20,000 jobs.

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WINGATE A Union County group announced Wednesday that it hopes to develop a 5,000-acre business-industrial-educational park about 35 miles southeast of Charlotte, off U.S. 74.

The plan is to lure industries, businesses and higher education complexes to the site, which offers rail service. It also could include residences above retail stores. If the facility – to be called Legacy Park – is built, it would be one of the Charlotte area's largest of its kind. By comparison, University Research Park is set on about 3,200 acres.

Union County Partnership for Progress, a nonprofit economic development group, unveiled ideas for the project during a forum at Wingate University. It was attended by about 100 elected and business leaders from Union, Mecklenburg and Anson counties.

Speakers didn't roll out a timeline. "This is a vision. This is an idea," said Maurice Ewing, president of Union County Partners for Progress. "We're not cutting ribbon today and we're not asking anybody to do anything. There's a lot of work and studying to be done. And a lot of work has already been done."

Ewing said the project could ultimately employ as many as 20,000 workers and would be built over 30 years or more. Investment could reach \$2.3 billion, he said.

Much of early planning has been done with guidance from Duke Energy's economic development leaders.

"We've been involved in economic development since 1904. As we've seen, textiles and tobacco and other business has declined," said Tony Almeida of Duke Energy. "Union County has special potential. One-third is developed and two-thirds is not..."

Two key elements are necessary for the plan to go forward, officials said. Legacy Park would need county-provided utilities and the state's completion of the planned Monroe Bypass, a proposed toll road that would connect Interstate 485 in Mecklenburg County to the northwestern tip of Legacy Park. Completion on the long-delayed bypass is set for 2013.

Staff writer Kerry Hall contributed.



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