

Chemical plant sale 'imminent'

n New rumors swirl around a pending sale of the former Merck Chemical plant.

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ALBANY — In a powerpoint presentation at the Albany-Dougherty Economic Development Commission's monthly meeting Wednesday, EDC Vice President Andrea Schruijer gave an overview of Dougherty County properties available to developers.

One of the plums of the list is the former Merck Chemical plant on Radium Springs Road, whose 1,000 acres include 850 that have not been developed. And while rumors swirl around the sale of the Merck plant, and EDC interim President Bobby McKinney called such a sale "imminent," contamination of the sewage system at the former Merck property may prove to be the red flag that thwarts the sale.

"Merck is marketing the plant," Schruijer told the Economic Development Commission board, and she noted after the meeting that the company was "accepting bids on the property through today."

"What (Merck officials) have told me is that they hope to choose a buyer by the 24th and close on a sale sometime in September," Schruijer said. "They haven't told me who the bidders are and how many of them there are, but they are moving forward with plans to sell the plant."

And even though new rumors surfaced Wednesday that a well-known pain reliever manufacturer is in negotiations to purchase the plant, Shruijer said Merck must deal with an Environmental Protection Division-mandated cleanup as a contingency to any sale.

"Whether or not a company could use the plant before the cleanup is completed, I think, would depend on what the plant manufactures," she said. Schruijer said the contamination cleanup could take up to seven years to complete.

EDC officials made the powerpoint presentation so that board members would be aware of properties available for developers should they have an opportunity to discuss the matter with companies interested in locating in the region.

Other property discussed by Schruijer included the 224-acre Albany-Dougherty, 350-acre Pecan Grove and 140-acre Parkway industrial parks in the county; the Delphi, Bobs Candies, Bridgestone/Firestone, MacGregor Center and Merck buildings; and the privately owned Royal (150 acres), Bridges (3,110 acres), Miles (448 acres), Phillips-Spurlock (282 acres), Wetherbee and Chandler (1,154 acres) properties.

County Administrator Richard Crowdis suggested that EDC officials keep infrastructure development of these properties in mind as the Special-Purpose Local-Option Sales Tax VI vote approaches.

"Infrastructure is the key, and the most important elements are water and sewer," Crowdis said. "I think some strategic planning, with SPLOST VI coming up, would allow us to identify areas where we could extend utilities. That's something this board and others could look at."

Crowdis added that a speculative building at the industrial parks could also help bring more potential business to the region.

"If you've got a spec building, people will come to your community," he said. "They may not end up locating in the spec building, but that will bring them here."

McKinney discussed the recently announced purchase of the ThermaCare product line from Procter & Gamble's Albany plant by Wyeth Consumer Healthcare and how it would impact the community.

"We're excited about the announcement," he said. "This (sale) is something that P&G does on a regular basis. They recently sold their Smuckers and Folgers brands, and the feeling, I think, was that since Wyeth manufactures Advil, the combination of ThermaCare and Advil will be a beneficial mix.

"We feel good that another Fortune 500 company will be coming to Albany."

The EDC's director of marketing, Barbara Rivera Holmes, said the development group was working on an upgraded Web site and logo to present to the board and was working to build contacts with state and local media to expand coverage of local

development news.

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