

460-Acre Industrial Park Planned In City

City, IDA, Developer Sign Joint Venture Agreement To Create Commerce I-85 Industrial Park
Commerce officials signed a joint venture agreement with the Jackson County Industrial Development Authority and a national developer in a move they believe will bring new jobs and new taxes to the city.

The agreement, signed by Mayor Charles L. Hardy Jr. , John W. Rooker, president of John W. Rooker and Associates and IDA Chairman Scott Martin, creates the Commerce I-85 industrial Park, a 460-acre tract, expandable to 800 acres, along Interstate 85 between Georgia Highway 98 (Maysville Road) and Ridgeway Church Road.

Rooker will own, manage and market the property. The agreement calls for it to exercise the option on 166 acres owned by the Marthella Hagan estate and to make the payment on the \$6 million bond issue the city used to acquire an adjacent 182 acres in May.

An ebullient Mayor Charles L. Hardy Jr. presided over the brief ceremony at the Commerce Civic Center, heaping praise on the city council for backing the project, the IDA for its financial assistance and for doing most of the legwork and on the Rooker team. He also thanked Jackson County Area Chamber of Commerce President Pepe Cummings.

“I can’t tell you just how big a day this is for Commerce,” Hardy told the group. Rooker seemed equally pleased.

“We are excited. This is a great opportunity for us and we promise you we will be great partners. We will be supportive not only of the city of Commerce and Jackson County, but also of the state of Georgia.”

Rooker told approximately 50 people in attendance that the project “will be our flagship development for this part of the country,” and noted that while working with the chamber, city and IDA, “we’ve had cooperation that is unbelievable from everybody.”

According to Hardy, the project is currently 460 acres, but Rooker said it could go up to 600 or even 800 acres “depending on who’s willing to come in with us.”

Rooker envisions at least 50 percent of businesses in the park to be manufacturers, and said his company is already talking with prospects.

“What we are looking for is high-paying jobs; that’s the plain and simple,” Rooker stated. Hardy said Norfolk-Southern Railway, which has committed to building a rail spur into the site, “has been going around the state showing this to people and we didn’t know anything about it.”

“It was a pleasure to be in a partnership with Commerce and John W. Rooker,” observed Martin, chairman of the IDA. “This is one of the best sites you will find on I-85.” He predicted that once the infrastructure to serve the area is installed, “it will only be a matter of time before industry comes in.”

“This is a huge step in Commerce’s history and will be looked on favorably for years to come,” Martin declared.

Jackson County will begin construction early next year on the extension of Steve Reynolds Industrial Parkway, parallel to I-85, to serve the industrial park. Commerce will supply water and sewerage services and natural gas. Industries will choose from among the city, Jackson EMC and Georgia Power to provide the electricity.

Most of the property is in the city limits, and Hardy said other tracts are in the process of being annexed. The entire site is also in the shared tax district created in the mid-1990s, which means the property taxes for education are split equally between the Commerce and Jackson County boards of education.

Speaking that night at the city council work session, Hardy told those who missed the event that “You missed one of the most important things to happen in Commerce in the last 50 years or more.” He also said that the city already has one industrial prospect which, if it selects property in the industrial park, could have a building under way before the Steve Reynolds Industrial Parkway extension is completed.

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