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Wichita Falls spending to woo development

Dallas Business Journal - by [Holli L. Estridge](#) Staff Writer

Rising commercial absorption rates have Wichita Falls officials on the hunt for more space to capture local expansions and relocations.

That's why the city's invested \$4 million so far in economic development sales tax dollars into a 525-acre business park on its southernmost reaches, along U.S. 287 and Fisher Road. Wichita Falls is a city of about 100,000 people, located 120 miles northwest of Fort Worth.

The Wichita Falls Board of Commerce and Industry, the entity that implements the city's sales tax-funded economic development program, recently opened 120 acres in the park to private development. Since then, officials have been courting large Dallas developers like The **Beck Group**, Trammell Crow Co. and **Panattoni Development Co.** for public-private partnerships in developing buildings in the park.

"So far, we're being told (by developers) that the city doesn't have enough absorption to warrant speculative investment," said Tim Chase, board president and CEO. "We're trying to leverage our sales tax incentives to reduce that risk."

Chase says the market's rising absorption rate first prompted the city to explore options for adding more commercial space in early 2003. Today, the city's absorption rate stands at about 88%, spread across about 3 million square feet of space equally shared by its retail and industrial sectors.

The city hired Gideon Toal and **Trinity Works**, both based in Fort Worth, and **Mesa Design Group** of Dallas to identify the location of the business park and help design it. "We really wanted to create a hybrid -- a private sector-like product funded through local sales tax dollars," Chase said.

The publicly funded park, after \$4 million in improvements, has dedicated entryways, lush landscaping, road and utility infrastructure, high-speed telecommunications and built-in retention ponds for improved drainage. The park also has potential for dual rail service, through Burlington Northern Santa Fe and **Union Pacific**.

Arterial roads provide access to the full 525 acres, which also contains infrastructure. The board has completed landscaping and signage on the 120-acre piece.

Chase said the city's hoping to find a private sector development partner, but it may consider adding speculative buildings in the future. Corporate interest also will determine whether the park will receive rail service.

Holmes Davis of **Binswanger** says users will go to the Wichita Falls Business Park once buildings are available. "I do believe, as with any market, if you have speculative development and facilities on the ground, you'll have manufacturers and distributors coming into these areas," he said. "If someone were to spec (build) a distribution or manufacturing plant in Wichita Falls they could attract a user that has an issue with the time it takes to build."

The city's access along Interstate 44 and U.S. 287 and low cost of doing business, also make it a strong location for manufacturers and distributors, Davis said.

hestridge@bizjournals.com / 817-693-0025

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