

Prison, hospital plans boost Junction City

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JUNCTION CITY — In a town where jobs seem to be evaporating as the economy continues to free-fall, city officials say they have good news: Work to improve infrastructure in preparation for the state prison and mental hospital is likely to draw other employers to the area.

News is spreading quickly that Junction City's urban growth boundary probably will expand.

The city's plans to improve water storage, route water and sewer lines to the prison site and expand the wastewater treatment plant might lure many.

As a result, said City Administrator David Clyne, it's likely that in addition to the thousands of jobs generated by the state facilities, other large companies such as Grain Miller of Eugene will be moving in.

Interest from multiple companies, including a bio-energy company looking to build in the area, has Clyne and other city staffers breathing a sigh of relief.

"We recognize that we're in a tough economy," he said, noting last week's closure of Junction City's Gibson Ford dealership and the downsizing of Country Coach. "But we think because of this project, the light for Junction City is certainly bright for the future — we think the long-term outcome is going to be healthy."

Plans for the 240-acre site where the state plans to build its prison and mental hospital are moving forward, and city staff said they'll have a firmer grasp on a construction schedule by next week.

Site work is expected to begin in 2009 on the minimum- and medium-security prison, with construction starting in 2010.

The adjacent state mental hospital will begin in 2013 and is scheduled for completion by 2015.

But even though crews won't start building until sometime next year, Junction City is getting busy.

Much of the work — like a new waste water system and expanded water storage — is needed with or without the prison, said Clyne.

"The waste water system was going to cost the city \$20 million," he said.

“But with the prison and hospital coming in, we will spend the \$20 million and receive \$70 million in infrastructure upgrades from the state.”

Those upgrades will include the construction of a water treatment plant, which will be fed by the wells the city currently relies on.

The project will also include a 2.5-million-gallon groundwater storage system, and the construction of two water towers to improve pressure.

Currently, the city can only store one million gallons of water — which Clyne said isn't enough for Junction City's nearly 5,000 residents.

With a population less than 4,000, nearby Harrisburg has the capacity to store more than 2.2 million gallons.

With plans to run water and sewer pipelines four miles to the prison site, the city is acquiring right-of-way easements and contacting property owners to ensure the lines will be completed.

The upgrades and expansions of the city's wastewater treatment plant, which will begin in 2010, are more than 12 years overdue.

“The city has been under orders to upgrade that plant since 1996,” Clyne said. “With or without the prison, this is something we would have had to do.”

And along with new services will come new jobs.

In addition to interest from outside employers looking to relocate, Clyne says the prison and hospital will boost employment.

In meetings with Roy Orr, the superintendent for the Salem Mental Health Facility, city staff discussed on-the-job certification programs for new employees and retraining for those making career changes.

“Unlike many in our state, we are fortunate that we will have 1,500 to 2,000 family-wage jobs arriving in our community,” Cline said. “This is going to have strong economic benefits for our community at a time when we need them.”