

New industrial park in Vineland to bring major job growth

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VINELAND - City Council on Tuesday officially put the wheels in motion on a major development project that is expected to lead to large-scale job creation and a big economic boost for Vineland.

The city, along with the Cumberland County Improvement Authority, is finalizing a \$4 million land sale with John Ruga, president of Northeast Precast in Millville, for a 280-acre site off Lincoln Avenue near Route 55 and the Millville border.

Plans call for Ruga to expand his operation at the site in Vineland while developing an industrial park capable of accommodating other business tenants. "This is essentially going to be another feather in the cap for the City of Vineland," Mayor Anthony Fanucci told The Daily Journal on Tuesday. "It's another major business coming into the city, one that will bring additional job growth and solid ratables on the tax base."

City Council passed a resolution at its Tuesday meeting that approved a master redevelopment and purchase and sale agreement with Ruga, who is operating as NEP Real Estate of Vineland Urban Renewal for this venture.

That agreement provides tentative details for the project, which is broken down into four phases and anticipates completion of the sale by March 31 of this year.

- Phase 1 and 1A call for a 120,000-square-foot steel and multi-use shop and installation of concrete batching plant in addition to two construction access driveways from Lincoln Avenue to start in the first quarter of 2018 and be completed within two years.
- Phase 2 calls for preparation of 400,000- to 600,000-square-foot master production building to be started before or during the first quarter of 2018 and completed within two years.
- Phase 3 calls for the construction of permanent corporate offices before or during the third quarter of 2019 and completed within five years of the effective date of agreement.
- Phase 4 calls for preparation of site and building pads for speculative buildings to start before or during the first quarter of 2019 and completed within five years of effective date of agreement.

Ruga, who grew up in Dororthy in Atlantic County and now lives in Vineland, said expanding in this area was "a big factor."

"We've been treated well here in Cumberland County," said Ruga, who started production with Northeast Precast in Millville in 2004. "I enjoy the area, I enjoy the people and we feel like we have a lot to offer.

"What I'm doing here is as much for the long-term benefit of the employees as anything. Over time, I want to give them a future that survives beyond me. So we definitely believe in Cumberland County and are excited about this next step."

[Ruga's operation](#) offers residential and commercial building solutions ranging from prefabricated foundations for homes to components for parking garages, highways and bridges. Ruga said the main focus of this expansion will be technology and applying the latest advances to their manufacturing operation. That's so much a priority that Ruga is even referring to the project as the Northeast Precast Tech Park. "We feel this is going to allow us to be more efficient in the future," Ruga said.

Ruga noted some of the timelines for the phases could change, particularly Phase 4, but he vowed to remain "aggressive" in developing the site. He said one suitor has already showed interest in relocating to the park — Italy-based SIMEM, which currently has an operation in Texas. The plan also carves out 10 acres for future expansion for the Vineland Municipal Electric Utility. The city's Clayville Substation fronts the site of the future industrial park on Lincoln Avenue.

Vineland Economic Development Director Sandy Forosisky, who played a vital role in facilitating this deal, said "this is going to be big" for the city. "When it's all said and done, you're looking at a proposal of over 1,000 jobs with ratables that are going to be in the tens of millions," Forosisky said.

The project site first drew interest in 2012 when a developer, Magic Sports Complex of New Jersey, pitched an elaborate \$350 million plan calling for athletic fields, lodging, restaurants and more at the location. Lack of funding eventually brought an end to that proposal.

In May 2017, CCIA Executive Director Jerry Velazquez announced a potential reboot of that vision with the City of Vineland after the two entities purchased the land earlier that year for \$3 million.

Fanucci said it was important for the city to control the land as it was the last large parcel available for development in Vineland and was in a desirable location close to a Route 55 interchange. "It was something I've looked at a number years going back to my days as a councilman," Fanucci said of the purchase. "It was a prudent move to acquire the land in partnership with the CCIA and bank it for future use."

"This has been a collective effort to transform an underutilized property into a substantial redevelopment initiative for the city and the county," Velazquez added.

Forosisky said both parties determined the sports complex to be cost prohibitive and began to explore other options. Ruga, Forosisky said, was looking for at least 100 acres for his expansion, making the location a logical match.

"This site offers the space and infrastructure for expansion and growth that this company needs to reach its full potential," Fanucci said.

Ruga said the goal is to break ground "right away" once the sale is finalized, adding he already has equipment on order for the site slated to arrive in May or June. "We are going to do everything we can to accelerate the process," Ruga said. "We can't get started soon enough."

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