City sweet on fruit company's land purchase

Joseph P. Smith, Vineland Daily Journal - Published 7:25 p.m. ET Nov. 13, 2018

VINELAND – The city is selling about 23 acres on West Garden Road near North Mill Road to a fruit import-export business that plans to put up a repackaging plant there.

The city will reap $830,200 from the agreement with Helen’s Acres, a limited liability company for Kopke Fruit Company. Kopke Fruit is a family owned business based in Great Neck, New York.

Sandy Forosisky, economic development director for the city, on Tuesday said a 170,000-square-foot plant is to be built in two stages. About 150 jobs are projected, she said.

The location actually is two lots, one at 1675 W. Garden Road and one at 1705 W. Garden Road. The lots are east of North Mill Road, where the city has an industrial park close to Route 55.

At its meeting Tuesday night, the City Council adopted an ordinance transferring the two lots to the city’s Industrial Commission.

The ordinance also transferred a third lot to the commission for potential sale to another agricultural company, Perro Farms. That lot comprises about 43 acres at 1615 W. Garden Road.

City Solicitor Richard Tonetta said the advantage of giving the land to the Industrial Commission is it is free to negotiate a land sale rather than holding an auction as city government would have to do.

Forosisky said the commission already has approved the sale to Helen’s Acres, so the transfer can happen immediately. The new owner is anxious to start construction as quickly as possible, she said.

Forosisky said Kopke Fruit had looked at a site in Gloucester County before deciding on Vineland.

“But this site was better suited,” she said. “He (the owner) liked the approvals were already in place and there was water and sewer.” A year ago, the city was moving ahead to sell the 23 acres to a firm called Buffalo Repack for the same amount of money. Helen’s Acres would have been a tenant, Forosisky said.

That deal was cancelled and this August the City Council rescinded its approval for the sale to make it possible for another company to purchase the land.

Joseph P. Smith; jsmith_dj; (856) 563-5252; jsmith@gannettntj.com