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Bayfield County enhances plan to fill business park



Bayfield County economic developer Scottie Sandstrom, left in top photo, and County Administrator Mark Abeles-Allison review the business park plan. Another new development, the new Northern Clearing plant, is located just west of the park.

By RON BROCHU

Developing a business park is difficult but necessary work. In today's world, new or expanding companies need shovel-ready sites to accommodate their new construction. In a competitive real estate market, potential occupants can pretty much choose among multiple business parks and private parcels to find the most amenities at the best price.

Bayfield County takes that scenario seriously when it comes to the 160-acre site it has been developing in the town of Eileen, approximately three miles west of Ashland and visible from U.S. Highway 2. One lot in the park has been sold annually since 2014.

- Three years ago, Superior Sauna moved into a new building on the site, which formerly had operated as a University of Wisconsin experimental agricultural station for nearly 100 years.

- In the summer of 2015, Bayfield Regional Food Producers Co-op purchased five acres on the site plus an option to buy eight more. The community supported agriculture (CSA) co-op also leases other land in the business park.

- This year, KV Tech Construction bought 10 acres for expansion. The company – which provides insulation, construction and excavation services – will continue to operate its Mason gravel pit but will likely stage the aggregate at its new headquarters, which is awaiting final permits. "It's a Bayfield County business that we supported when it was ready to expand," said Scottie Sandstrom, Bayfield County Economic Development Corp. executive director.

Those companies now occupy about 37 acres, but 123 remain developable in the park, which is zoned for commercial and agricultural uses (the county is willing to rezone agricultural parcels to industrial if the need arises). Bayfield County is ramping up its sales effort this year, creating detailed informational

documents for distribution to potential customers. Beyond targeting existing county firms, a key initiative will be to spread the word among outside business owners who have a second home or lake property in Bayfield County.

"Last fall, we finalized a document having all the specifications of the business park property. It's a comprehensive overview of what is there and what needs to be done for future development," said Sandstrom.

The site plan indicates where the county will construct an access road. A certified survey map also is being prepared. Beyond providing land data, the plan also serves as a marketing document.

"We're really excited about the site because it offers a fair amount of diversity. There's access on state highways and very close access from U.S. Highway 2. We also have access from a state farm road. For those who want to be more removed, there are internal parcels that will be accessible only by the business park road," said Bayfield County Administrator Mark Abeles-Allison.

For those who truly love the outdoors, the park borders the Tri-County Corridor, a former Northern Pacific right of way that continues west to Superior. It provides multiple transportation options for people who might want to combine recreation with their commute.

"People can bike to work, run to work or ATV to work from a lot of different areas," Abeles-Allison said. "They can live in a rural area and still be close to their job. This site is less than two miles from Lake Superior. There's good access to ATV trails, fishing, hunting. It's close to your passions and also close to work."

He and Sandstrom said public-private cooperation has been instrumental in making the park attractive for potential occupants. In January of 2016, six members of Bayfield County's Executive Committee formed the Business Park

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Kwik Trip on track to open four new stores in northwest Wisconsin



By BETH PROBST

Kwik Trip is adding four new northwest Wisconsin locations to its fleet of stores in the region this fall. District Leader Layne Froehlich, who oversees operations in northern Wisconsin, reports the three stores in Ashland will open in August, October and December, with a fourth opening this November in Park Falls.

The first to open will be in the center of Ashland, next to Super One. A store on the east side will open next, with one on the west side opening last. Planning for the Ashland stores started approximately three years ago, when Kwik Trip began adding stores in the Twin Ports area.

"As soon as we started placing stations in the Twin Ports, people in the Ashland area asked when we were coming there," Froehlich recalled.

Even then, company executives knew it was only a matter of time, citing a combination of reasons Ashland is an ideal market for Kwik Trip. This includes reviewing traffic counts, the high

number of tourists in the region throughout the year, and the natural intersections of U.S. Highway 2 going to the east and west and State Highway 13 going to the north and south.

"The combination of these things make Ashland a logical location," he explained. As for why they are doing three stores, "Our research shows there is the traffic to support it."

This isn't uncommon. Since Kwik Trip came to the Twin Ports, the company has opened 19 stores with several more in the works in Carlton and Hermantown. Multiple locations can be found in Duluth, Superior and Cloquet.

The family owned company has a long history in Wisconsin. The first store opened during 1965 in Eau Claire. Today, they employ more than 18,000 people throughout the Midwest at their 400+ stores, warehouses and corporate offices. The company is often recognized as a top place to work, in part due to its benefits package and profit sharing program. Froehlich said those perks help them attract and retain quality employees.

"As the economy gets better, it becomes an interesting hiring market. But, we are finding that employees are seeking a good benefits package, which is what we offer to both full and part-time employees."

The company completed its first round of job fairs for their first Ashland location last spring. Froehlich said they had more than 300 applicants for the first location, and of that they hired 40 employees. They are currently starting to hire for the second and third locations. In

total, he anticipates a \$20 million investment within Ashland.

Ashland Chamber of Commerce Director Mary McPhetridge said she isn't surprised that Kwik Trip was attracted to the area.

"Ashland has a long-term sustainable economy. Over the years, when we've seen one segment of the economy struggle, other segments lifted us up. We are resilient and I think that makes us an attractive area for businesses to invest in."

The company is already looking for ways to invest in the region beyond buildings and payroll.

"We are a community oriented company that is heavily involved in the com-

munities we are located," Froehlich said. "We're always members of the chamber and seek out special projects. The community shops at our store, and we give back to them."

McPhetridge said she's already noticed this when interfacing with the company.

"They are a company that practices what they preach," she said. "I've heard so many positive things about the culture of Kwik Trip. From the corporate offices to the locals they are hiring, everyone seems so passionate and excited about their job. I just think that is a good sign about what's to come."

Beth Probst is a freelance writer based in Iron River.

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Planning Committee, an advisory group that includes one elected official plus business, utility and economic development representatives. They've helped to ensure the rural site has services similar to those offered in a metro setting. They include broadband Internet access from three companies, electric power (including three-phase) from two firms, telephone service from two companies and natural gas access.

"A lot of resources come together on this site," Abeles-Allison said. "We hope to fill the business park by the end of this decade."

The over-arching goal is to create opportunities that keep young people in the area.

"Having job opportunities is critical," he said. "The number one priority is to help with job creation. This facility will complement the other facilities we have in Barnes, Iron River, Bayfield and Washburn. We have lots to offer – lots of resources – and the park is close to Ashland and Washburn."

Beyond providing site assistance, the county and its development corporation work closely with the Wisconsin Department of Administration, Department of Transportation, Northwest Regional Planning Commission and area banks to assist companies with their financial needs, Sandstrom said.

