

Amazon warehouse planned for Norwich Occum Industrial Center

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The identity of the mystery company under contract to develop the Occum Industrial Center's largest lot — about half of the 184-acre future business park north of Interstate 395 — was revealed Thursday night.

Bluewater Construction Group has filed applications with the city to develop the 92-acre parcel, known as Lot 10, with a 1.1 million-square-foot distribution facility that would be owned and operated by Amazon.

At its Thursday meeting, members of the city's Inland Wetlands, Watercourses & Conservation Commission voted to accept three applications from Bluewater, a New York City-based company that specializes in developing distribution centers and other large industrial buildings, including logistics facilities.

City Planner Dan Daniska said Bluewater is currently developing a similar Amazon distribution center in Waterbury.

The applications are for wetlands permits required for the project. Commissioners also voted to schedule public hearings on all three applications for their Oct. 1 meeting.

At Thursday's meeting, Bluewater officials gave a brief virtual presentation, saying Amazon would use the warehouse to receive and store items in bulk for order fulfillment. The fulfillment center would use high-tech sorting equipment and be constructed with high-quality building materials.

The exterior would consist of precast concrete and insulated metal panels over a steel frame and would include advanced fire protection and life-safety systems, project officials said.

Inside, the one-story building would feature a large mezzanine, office space and employee support areas.

The center would serve as a "first-mile" facility, meaning it would be one of the first stops in the shipping supply chain.

Officials said warehouses like the one proposed for Norwich are typically assessed at more than \$150 million.

“They’ll be using a lot of robotics, which represents a lot of personal property tax,” Mayor Swarnjit Singh said.

Bluewater estimates that the project would bring about 500 permanent jobs, 200 construction jobs and additional indirect economic benefits to Norwich.

The Norwich Community Development Corp. is developing the 184-acre, 10-lot industrial center on 384 acres of NCDC-owned land off Interstate 395. The 10 lots will be accessed by a 5,500-foot road featuring a roundabout and walking trail. The city has obtained \$11.4 million in state funding for the access road and is seeking the remaining \$6.9 million, which would fund construction to the property line of Lot 10.

NCDC President Kevin Brown said Thursday that the access road design is 95% complete and that the city expects to issue a request for proposals for construction within the next month or so.

Singh said the city will hold public information sessions on the project in September, ahead of the Oct. 1 public hearing.

“I think it’s a very good project for Norwich,” he said.

“I have always said the solution for Norwich is getting the industry back. And we are now finally getting that industry back here, which will create good-paying jobs and generate grand list growth that can help us regain affordability in our town,” he said. “Everything is finally coming to fruition.”

Singh referred to the city’s efforts to secure numerous grants for construction of the access road, during which officials highlighted the project’s benefits to state leaders. Officials view the industrial center as having the potential to transform the city’s tax base.

Singh added that jobs at distribution centers do not require advanced skills.

“And we have a lot of demographics here, a lot of diverse communities. And I think that will give them a chance to get employed,” he said.

Daniska said the applications typically would include a site walk, but because of the size of the project and the property’s difficult terrain, the department asked the commission to allow Bluewater to fly a drone and provide a narrated video instead.

“Because when we had a site walk for the original industrial center subdivision, it’s very difficult terrain. A couple people fell. So the commission agreed to allow them to fly a drone and provide a narrated tour,” he said.

Daniska added that the city will contract with one of its on-call engineering firms to provide a third-party review of the wetlands portions of the applications. The firm will submit an impartial review to Daniska, who will consider it as part of the approval process.

Daniska said one of the applications accepted Thursday night is “the main site application, where the project would be.” The other two are for off-site locations at 300 and 374 Canterbury Turnpike, where no buildings are proposed. Instead, those properties would be used to implement wetlands mitigation measures, depending on the level of disturbance at the main site.

For more than a year, the identity of the prospective tenant remained unknown. Brown said nondisclosure agreements and confidentiality requirements prevented officials from identifying the company without jeopardizing the deal. A few months ago, however, the city’s application for a since-denied federal grant revealed that NCDC had signed a contract for Lot 10 with a Fortune 100 freight and delivery company.

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