
\$1 million grant for Synergy Park road development

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Sometimes the road to opportunity is paved with roads.

That's the idea behind a \$1 million grant the U.S. Department of Commerce has earmarked for the Kilgore Economic Development Corporation's efforts to open up Synergy Park. .

KEDC director Amanda Nobles is still awaiting written confirmation of the grant, but has received a Commerce Department press release estimating the Economic Development Administration grant could lead to 150 new jobs and generate \$8 million in private investment, according to Commerce Secretary Gary Locke.

The project will extend Synergy Boulevard to the west side of Orgill, and will connect Synergy Boulevard and Elder Lake Road on the north side of the industrial park's largest occupant, Orgill Inc.

"That gives us access to about 70 acres we own on the north side of Orgill," Nobles said.

"It will also give us access to over 200 acres we bought a few years ago in case someone needed a site that large," Nobles said.

The scenic piney woods setting has the disadvantage of making it hard to envision a property's uses, she said.

"This way, we'll be able to drive up to the land and say, 'This is it.' We could have done it before, but we would have had to drive on four-wheelers and that doesn't show too well when you can't see anything but pine trees," she said.

When Orgill Inc. first came to Kilgore, they opened in December 2007.

"When they came, they bought a 65-acre site that would accommodate a future expansion, and they promised us in exchange for incentives we offered at the time that within 36 months they would have between 135-150 jobs.

We're at 24 months and they just reported 180 employees," Nobles said.

"They told us in five years time, they expect to have 300 employees, and we want them to be able to expand as much as they want to expand," Nobles said, estimating it will take a year to get the needed infrastructure in place.

"We will be ready whenever Orgill is ready to expand in the future," she said, citing recent reports of the company's generosity to the community in the form of a \$10,000 donation to the United Fund of Kilgore.

"Obviously, they are a great corporate citizen, and we want to keep expanding our park so we can meet their needs when they expand for growth."

KEDC board president Bobby Beane saw the project's potential for bringing more businesses to the park.

“We’ll be able to make the land available for new or existing businesses,” he said.

Currently, there are six companies located in Synergy Park; the next largest employer is Cleveland Steel, with an estimated 40 employees, Nobles said.

“For a town the size of Kilgore, Synergy Park has been a great project,” she said.

The total cost of the project for roadway and utility improvements in the grant-supported project will be \$3,126,845. The balance of the cost will be picked up by the KEDC.

“The EDA grant is a nice way to leverage local money with federal dollars,” Nobles said.

The initial request from KEDC was for \$1.5 million - and Nobles is grateful for the gift that’s two-thirds of what she originally asked for.

“That’s \$1 million of local money we can save for other projects and invest in the community in different ways,” she said.