

Iowa's only 'super park' ready for business tenants

Environmental, geological testing completed for park near Eastern Iowa Airport



A conceptual rendering taken from a marketing video for the Cedar Rapids Air and Land Super Park shows what the business park may look like when it has tenants. The Eastern Iowa Airport is shown at the top of the photo. (Shive-Hattery)

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CEDAR RAPIDS — Today, it's hundreds of acres of corn and soybeans that are several weeks away from harvest. But Iowa's only business "super park" is expected

to provide fields of opportunity for decades to come.

The nearly 600-acre Cedar Rapids Air and Land Super Park north of The Eastern Iowa Airport was certified on July 13, 2015, by McCallum Sweeney Consulting of Greenville, S.C. The Iowa Economic

Development Authority contracted with McCallum Sweeney, a nationally recognized site-selection firm, to design and implement its certified site program.

“McCallum Sweeney is really the ‘gold standard’ in terms of site certification,” IEDA Director Debi Durham said in a phone interview Friday, “We wanted them to provide us with high standards.

“We need to accommodate decisions made at the speed of business. To do that, we need to make sure that Iowa has a balanced inventory of sites that are truly development-ready.”

Durham said her agency fielded a lead Wednesday regarding a European warehouse logistics company seeking to develop a facility in the United States.

“I think the Cedar Rapids Air and Land Super Park is a perfect location for this company,” Durham said. “If they make a decision for Iowa, they want to go quickly.

“When you can hand the extensive documentation that’s been done to a company, particularly their engineering and design firms, they can review it fairly quickly. It becomes a matter of check mark, check mark, check mark.”

There is no national standard in terms of criteria for super parks. McCallum Sweeney designed the Iowa site-certification program based on criteria used to certify super parks in other states, and customized it in terms of water and sewer requirements based on what is needed for food processing, a major industry in Eastern Iowa.

Super parks typically have a minimum of 500 acres available for development. “Mega” parks found in large metropolitan areas have a minimum of 1,000 acres.

The Cedar Rapids business park includes 483 acres owned by the airport and 98.65 acres owned by private investors. It is hoped it will attract a variety of industries, including logistics and distribution, advanced manufacturing, and the biotech and food sectors.

To meet the additional criteria for a certified super park, the site has to have adequate electric, natural gas, water and wastewater capacity, as well as access to interstate highways, air and rail service.

Companies hoping to build new facilities are looking for sites that are not only suitable for development, but also are relatively risk free in terms of unknown expenses.

Kimberly Williams, a principal and senior consultant with McCallum Sweeney, said the Iowa certified-site program is very rigorous in terms of the criteria that must be met.

“Some certified site programs are a checklist ‘fill in the questionnaire,’ but Iowa’s program requires five different types of due diligence,” Williams said.

The site must be:

I Outside the 100-year flood plain

I Free of environmental concerns

I Free of wetlands or have a plan for mitigation

I Free of endangered or threatened species or have a plan for mitigation

I Free of areas of archaeological or historical significance or have a plan for mitigation.

“An Iowa certified site truly is ready for development,” Williams said.

“The due diligence has been done and the conditions have been thoroughly vetted.”

Brian Crowe, economic development specialist with the Cedar Rapids Metro Economic Alliance, is working with the IEDA to put the Cedar Rapids Land and Air Super Park in front of corporate decision-makers and site selection consultants.

“We are getting increasing looks by projects of size,” Crowe said. “We have a site that’s ready for development, as opposed to just land.

“We have the right-of-way mapped out in the area as well as where future right-of-way can be connected. We have some of the design work already done.”

He added that, “From a timing and speed to readiness perspective, we are well beyond land. We are looking to attract large users who can take advantage of that amount of infrastructure and that amount of space.”

The recently completed video below provides a conceptual representation of what the business park might look like in future years after businesses and/or developers have constructed buildings and physical infrastructure — roads, streetlights, signs, etc. — has been installed.

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Try watching this video on www.youtube.com, or enable JavaScript if it is disabled in your browser.

The IEDA's Durham said the video is a valuable tool to sell the super park to potential tenants and developers.

"It was extremely well done and we have loaded onto certified site area of our website," she said. "It's a great idea and a really nice addition."

Development will drive construction of infrastructure within the business park, Airport Director Marty Lenss said.

"That will guide where we bring water, sewer, natural gas and electricity," Lenss said. "There are some things you can do with utilities like water and sewer ahead of time that help with the overall marketability of the site. Those are some things that we are looking at now and how we will be able to do it."

With the business park's proximity to the airport and the fact that a majority of the land was purchased with federal funding, Lenss said the Federal Aviation Administration has been kept abreast of plans for the business park.

"The FAA's regional office in Kansas City is aware of our super park plans," Lenss said. "Our airport layout plan, which is a document that guides development per The Eastern Iowa Airport, identifies the land as

'non-aeronautical revenue.' It's a term that means essentially it's going to be a business park.

"If a development would come along, we would do what is called a proposed construction, which the FAA would review in terms of the building and any cranes that might be involved in the construction."

Lenss said the FAA district office staff will receive a briefing this month that will include the recently completed conceptual video.

"I think it create a vertical vision of what it will ultimately look like," he said. "Just looking at corn and soybeans, it's really hard to see it. The video creates a sense of what can be created in terms of commerce and employment."

Dave Kapler, senior vice president of the Foth Companies, which serves as the airport's landside consulting engineering company, said very few, if any, upgrades would be required in terms of streets that would connect with the business park.

"Seventy-sixth Avenue SW was recently reconstructed and 18th Street SW was done when Nordstrom Direct came in 1996," Kapler said.

Wright Brothers Boulevard SW still is in good condition, he added.

"It really depends on where the traffic is heading," Kapler said. "If it's on and off Interstate 380, 18th Street, 76th Avenue and Wright Brothers Boulevard should be able to handle it."

Increased traffic at 18th Street and Wright Brothers Boulevard might require the addition of traffic lights for a controlled intersection, Lenss noted.

The airport leases land for development rarely selling parcels. Nordstrom Inc. recently exercised a provision in its lease to purchase the 0.6 acres where its distribution center is located for \$1.2 million.

The Cedar Rapids Airport Commission, the Cedar Rapids City Council and the FAA had to approve the sale.

Crowe and Lenss said having Nordstrom invest in the community will help land additional businesses for the adjacent super park.

"For an outside business or developer looking at this property, Nordstrom is a nationally known brand," Lenss said.

“When you zoom out to a three-mile radius of the park, there are well-known companies like Archer Daniels Midland, Cargill, General Mills, Ingredion, PepsiCo/Quaker Oats, Rockwell Collins, Toyota and Transamerica,” Crowe said. “It tells a potential tenant this is not a risky site for development.

“It also speaks to the quality of our workforce and a total potential labor force of more than 643,000.”

CEDAR RAPIDS LAND AND AIR SUPER PARK

Certification date: July 13, 2015

Size: 582 acres (483 airport owned, 98.65 investor owned)

Utilities:

Electricity — 15 megawatts

Natural gas — 32,000 million cubic feet

Water — More than 1 million gallons per day

Wastewater — More than 1.8 million gallons per day

Transportation:

1 mile west of Interstate 380

2 miles south of U.S. 30

20 miles north of Interstate 80

Adjacent to The Eastern Iowa Airport

82 miles to The Port of Dubuque (Mississippi River)

Workforce:

Cedar Rapids laborshed area has a total potential labor force of more than 643,000

Source: Corridor Alliance