



Kasarda sees 'tremendous boost' from such an investment.

Project in works for TransPark

Aviation company may hire hundreds

By Jonathan B. Cox, Staff Writer

An aviation company is poised to invest as much as \$600 million in the Global TransPark, breathing life into a business park long criticized as a boondoggle.

An announcement could come as soon as this week, though several details must be finalized.

The Golden LEAF Foundation, which oversees a pot of state funds, is expected to consider a grant to help attract the company. The Economic Investment Committee, which oversees one of the most lucrative state incentives, has scheduled a 10 a.m. meeting Wednesday.

The Global TransPark's board of directors also is set to meet at 10 a.m. that day.

None of the agencies involved would publicly confirm details of the project, which likely would bring hundreds of jobs, or give the name of the company.

But Spirit AeroSystems on April 29 filed to do business in North Carolina, according to documents with the N.C. Secretary of State's Office. The company, which is based in Wichita, Kan., manufactures components for airplanes, including fuselages and wings.

Spirit was formed in 2005 when a Canadian company bought a Boeing division. Spirit has expanded since and now serves clients including Boeing, Airbus, Hawker Beechcraft, Gulfstream and Cessna. Debbie Gann, a spokeswoman for the company, declined to comment on Spirit's plans for North Carolina.

If the state can land a \$600 million investment, "it would be a tremendous boost and one that would be important not just for the Global TransPark but the entire Eastern region," said John D. Kasarda, director of UNC-Chapel Hill's Kenan Institute of Private Enterprise, who came up with the concept for the business park.

Kasarda said he did not know specifics of the potential new tenant.

The Global TransPark, which encompasses 2,400 acres, has struggled since its inception. The General Assembly created it in 1991 as an economic stimulus for a rural region near Kinston. The TransPark was supposed to become a hub for aviation, manufacturing and logistics.

Today, it has 12 tenants including the N.C. Highway Patrol and N.C. Forest Service.

FedEx passed over the park in 1998, choosing Greensboro for a \$300 million sorting hub with as many as 1,500 workers. In 2003, the TransPark made Boeing's short list for a 1,200-employee plant after state and local leaders offered \$534 million in incentives. Boeing chose Everett, Wash.

The state's courtship of Boeing, though, could have given the TransPark an edge in this project. While it is not in one of the state's major urban centers -- the Triad, Triangle or Charlotte -- it benefits from proximity to military bases.

Seymour Johnson Air Force Base in Goldsboro, for instance, is about 30 miles away. That could provide a pipeline of talent for the operation.

An economic development project with \$600 million in investment and hundreds of jobs likely would command tens of millions of dollars in state and local incentives, based on awards to companies with similar expansion.

The Golden LEAF board, which manages more than \$700 million in public money stemming from the national tobacco settlement, met for almost two hours in private Monday. Valeria Lee, the foundation's president, said the board considered "an economic development project that will have great impact on the state of North Carolina."

She refused, though, to provide any details.

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