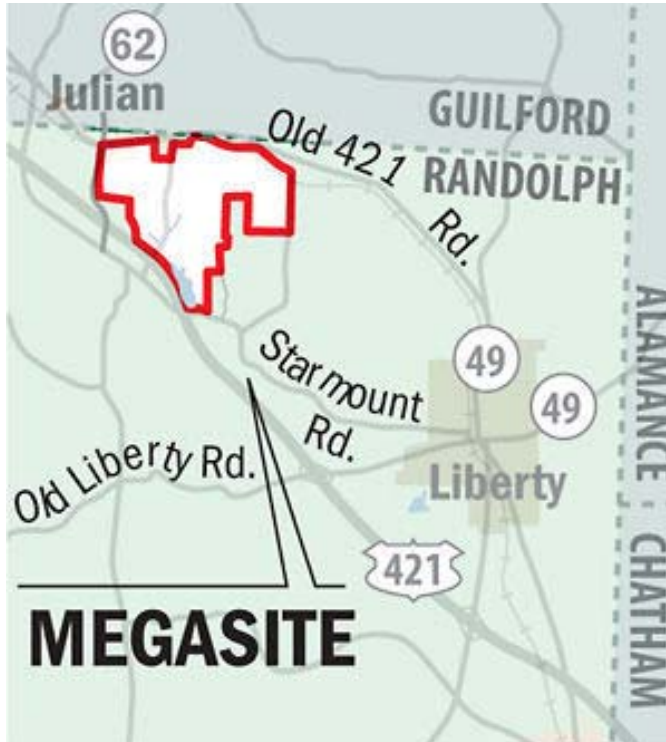


NEWS & RECORD

Consultant: Megasite tops North Carolina's presence on short list for Toyota-Mazda factory



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By Richard M. Barron - October 24, 2017

GREENSBORO — North Carolina has made the short list of three states that Toyota-Mazda is considering for its joint electric-car factory, and the Triad's Greensboro-Randolph Megasite is the likely top pick in the state, a top economic development expert said Tuesday.

Site-selection consultant John Boyd, of Princeton, N.J., said "I expect the megasite to be a prime candidate for the Toyota-Mazda factory."

Neither company makes an all-electric vehicle, and Toyota and Mazda said earlier this year they have created a partnership to build a \$1.6 billion factory that would employ up to 4,000 workers to make hundreds of thousands of cars per year by 2020.

They likely will choose a final site in the next three-to-six months.

An incentive package of more than \$1 billion may be required to lure North Carolina's first automobile manufacturing prize, and Boyd said that Gov. Roy Cooper is involved in the recruiting process.

The 1,500-acre site in the northeast corner of Randolph County is a prime site, Boyd said, because Norfolk Southern and the North Carolina Railroad Co. have made a strong commitment there. And community and political leaders from Greensboro and Randolph County have spent millions buying land and beginning an infrastructure.

Residents say the megasite has seen intense activity from visitors and workers in recent months, including groups in buses and frequent helicopter flyovers.

"Over the past several weeks, I and other neighbors have on several occasions observed large vans and tent canopies on a plot of land on which we know the megasite folk like to meet," said Alan Ferguson, a lawyer who lives on property adjacent to the megasite in Randolph and has opposed its development. "We have also observed helicopters flying slow circles above our houses, around the proposed site. One helicopter I watched on a Sunday morning was a large, multiseat machine that I have never seen flying over our countryside before. This one made a couple of slow circles and passed right over my house."

David Allen, chairman of the Randolph County Board of Commissioners, said he doesn't know how serious the interest is, but he, too, has seen activity at the site beyond the work that Duke Energy, surveyors and others are doing to prepare it to be occupied within two years.

"I have seen some buses out there — one back in June, one more recently," Allen said. "As I was going to church, we happened to see a vehicle approach and slow down and crawl into the site on Browns Meadow Road."

The North Carolina Railroad Co., Randolph County and the Greensboro-Randolph Megasite Foundation have spent more than \$32 million buying land at the site from private owners. If an automotive company selects the site, the land likely would become part of an incentive package along, with the water, sewer, road and power infrastructure that Greensboro, the state and Duke Energy are preparing to build.

Boyd said stepped-up activity at the site is surely an indication of business interest.

"I just tend to think this might be the moment for that trophy employer that this site has been looking for for a long time," Boyd said.

Boyd said, based on his experience with the state and discussions with other consultants and commercial real estate experts, that politics and proximity are driving the Toyota-Mazda decision.

He believes that Toyota is taking the first step to acquire Mazda by forming this new partnership, and the company will need as much support in Washington, D.C., as it can get to persuade regulators that such a merger of automotive giants would be good for the market.

And although Toyota has factories throughout the Southeast, it has no presence in North Carolina, which gives it an opportunity to expand its footprint and win the allegiance of another Congressional delegation to Washington.

"Politics has always played a role in site selection, but never to this extent," Boyd said.

North Carolina has megasites in Rocky Mount, Moncure and Chatham County, a few miles south of the Randolph site. But Boyd, who has represented several clients in the state, said none is as qualified as the Randolph site.

"In my judgment that site is extra, extra special," he said, because it is near a strong manufacturing workforce, has a good road infrastructure and is near Asheboro Regional Airport, which can handle large private jets.

"Executives are going to be spending a lot of time at this site," he said.