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ALERT

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Manufacturer plans to build at railport

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An overview of the Northeastern Nevada Regional Railport taken Aug. 24, 2018.

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ELKO – The world’s largest geosynthetics manufacturer, Solmax International Inc., proposes building a plant at Northeastern Nevada Regional Railport, and Elko County Commissioners helped clear a path for the facility by approving a variance that allows seven-day, 24-hour operations.

“This is a great opportunity for Elko County,” the county’s senior planner and county surveyor, Corey Rice, told commissioners.

Solmax's president and chief executive officer, Jean-Louis Vangeluwe, said Friday that the county's approval means the company is "free to move ahead to buy the land and start construction of the plant," but he said the company has not yet decided when it will start construction.

"Our main and primary objective is to be closer to our customers on the other side of the Rockies and also offer a local alternative for the mining industry in Nevada (a great consumer of geomembrane)," Vangeluwe, said in an email.

Solmax's purchase of the 21.47-acre property from Port of Elko LLC was contingent on the variance being granted.

Solmax Geosynthetics LLC, the U.S. registered name for the Quebec-based, international company, asked for the variance because the current master plan for the railport on East Idaho Street does not allow 24-hour operations. Rice said county commissioners needed to approve the request because the variance is to the master plan.

The Elko County Planning Commission has already unanimously approved the variance, he said at the June 3 commissioners meeting. The planners held a public hearing on May 20.

Solmax products are used in the mining industry but also by other industries, including agriculture, water and sewer facilities, landfills, and "all kinds of things," Rice said.

"It's great we're getting companies such as this and Southwest Energy with a client based throughout the Western U.S. It's great to see diversification," Commissioner Cliff Eklund said at the meeting.

Southwest Energy is planning an explosives plant at Carlin.

Rice's report states that with the manufacture of geo-membrane, the plant cannot be shut down, except for maintenance.

“The process is a 24-hour, 7-day a week process that making it impossible for this business to function within the operation restrictions for ‘Zone 1, Item 2’ of the Northeastern Nevada Regional Railport Land Use Master Plan,” the report says.

The report also says that staff believes the variance for a 24-hour operation would have little negative impact on the surrounding properties.

“I don’t know how you can call it an industrial park and not allow operations 24 hours a day,” said Commissioner Rex Steninger.

Solmax expects to have four or five trucks a day moving product from the plant, and the company will receive materials by rail, Rice also said, and “the majority of deliveries will be in daylight.”

According to the May 20 minutes of the Elko County Planning Commission, a representative of Solmax, Gilles Garand, said via Zoom that the product would be shipped Monday through Friday, not during weekends or overnight, except on special occasions.

He said the membrane that they produce is on large rolls.

Eklund said he had noticed that noise levels, lights and traffic and were considered regarding 24-hour operation of the manufacturing plant that would be seen from Interstate 80, and Rice said lights will be turned down and away from the highway and the noise level meets criteria.

The report states that Solmax conducted noise testing at an existing facility in Canada, and the nearest resident from the railport property is roughly 550 feet away and on the opposite side of I-80. The staff recommends noise levels not exceed 80 decibels.

One nearby resident, Bernard Cornejo, told the planning commission he strongly opposed the variance for Solmax because of noise already at the railport, including security alarms, safety alarms, over-fill alarms and back-up alarms, as well as chunks of iron dropping into gondola cars.

He also suggested sound barriers at the railport.

Planning Commissioner John Geary said at the May 20 meeting that he lives closer than Cornejo to where business is conducted at the railport, and he has no trouble sleeping at night.

Meanwhile, Solmax has continues to expand. According to the latest announcement on June 1 that it had completed acquisition of Georgia-based TenCate Geosynthetics.

Vangeluwe said Friday that Tencate has an international footprint “which will position Solmax as the undisputed leader worldwide of the geosynthetic market Solmax has 19 manufacturing sites around the world, he said.

Rice said Solmax originally looked at Henderson for a facility, but Henderson turned the company down, and “that is how they found Elko.”