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State funds could help key industrial park utility work

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A year-old proposal to develop a 375-acre industrial park on the east side of Ames may be in line for some economic development assistance, according to local and state sources.

A new round of state "I-Jobs" funding, to be considered in the 2010 session of the Iowa Legislature, may give the city of Ames a chance to pay for a sanitary sewer that would serve the proposed Sunrise Prairie Business Park.

The park was suggested last year by a partnership that includes the Ames Economic Development Commission and two utilities that would serve park tenants: Alliant Energy, of Des Moines, and Consumes Energy, of Marshalltown.

The city of Ames has made a verbal commitment to help with infrastructure costs, and the partnership has asked the Story County Board of Supervisors for help with buying the land, according to Dan Culhane, president and CEO of the Ames Chamber of Commerce and AEDC.

But the negotiations "are somewhat stalled now," Culhane said Monday. "We have no options on (any of) the properties involved (in the proposal)," he said.

A key component is a sanitary sewer line to be extended along 13th Street beneath Interstate 35, "and that is something that the (Bucky) Wolford (lifestyle retail center) development is responsible for," Culhane said.

City Manager Steve Schainker said the city has been in contact with Wolford and "he's still very interested in proceeding."

"It's just that it's difficult to sign long-term leases (with potential anchor tenants) because of the state of the economy," Schainker said.

Schainker said that earlier in 2009, the Ames City Council chose not to apply for I-Jobs or stimulus money for the 13th Street sewer, instead leaving the responsibility to Wolford.

But according to Troy Price, chief of staff at Gov. Chet Culver's office, the Iowa Finance Authority expects to have another \$100 million available for I-Jobs projects to be awarded in 2010.

The decision on who gets the money will be the responsibility of the Iowa Legislature after it convenes in January, Price said.

Shawna Lode, communications director for the Iowa Finance Authority, said there is at least the potential for more funding after the Legislature starts working with the as-yet unallocated \$100 million I-Jobs funding.

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