
ODC Grants Company \$1 Million

By Odessa Admin

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The Odessa Development Corp. board gave Lufkin Industries a million reasons to keep its operations in Odessa Thursday.

The \$1 million economic grant is designed to entice the company to build a new \$8.5 million facility in Larry Lee's business park near Interstate 20, said Gary Vest, economic development director for the Odessa Chamber of Commerce. The site will employ 86 people at a 35,000 square foot warehouse and a 13,000 square foot office building.

It will also bring in \$3.2 million in annual payroll, Vest said.

Along with oil and gas products like pumpjacks, the site will be involved in electronics and also serve as a training area for the company's workers in the region, Vest said.

Lufkin is looking to consolidate its Midland and Odessa operations. After a closed session discussion, Vest said the board approved the "concepts" of a contract.

He hopes to have issues on the contract worked out in time for a vote at the Odessa City Council's Feb. 24 meeting.

"We hope to accomplish this quickly," Vest said of the task formerly known as "Project Pump."

At a meeting where it was acknowledged that the city is moving its focus from workforce recruitment to job creation, the board received a report from Leslie Toombs on a workforce recruitment study she was commissioned to do. Toombs, a University of Texas of the Permian Basin management professor, said the community has 10 different websites for job placement, varying from the City of Odessa to educational institutions.

"Everybody is really working hard to recruit employees to Odessa," she said. "But you don't have an appearance of a unified brand to the community."

Toombs, who was paid \$6,825 as a consultant on the study, said the area's workforce development board is an important body to go through. But, since it serves a 17-county area, Odessa needs a community-specific board, made up of different entities in the community that can coordinate efforts.

So ODC Board President Rick Carlton announced the board will appoint a task force at its March meeting.

Despite a change in the need for workers, business owner Raymond Chavez said it's still crucial to coordinate efforts to better spend funds.

He said a \$1.7 million Department of Labor Community-based Job Training grant to Odessa College's welding program now looked like it could have been better spent, since the demand for new welders is vanishing. Instead, he wants to use funds for more economically diverse jobs.

"Let's train for the future, let's not train for the past," he said. "You've got to be careful how you spend your money. It may not produce."

Also at the meeting, James Zentner, Odessa assistant city manager, said the recent run of record sales tax figures could be coming to an end. The city's February check of \$2,912,173.36 was a 12.28 percent increase over February 2008.

"I anticipate some changes coming down the line - starting maybe next month," he said.