

Wooster Council TGS plan OK'd

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WOOSTER -- City Council officially made its offer to try and secure 150 new jobs and a \$6 million investment from TechniGraphics on Monday, and now the waiting game begins.

Council enthusiastically approved a 10-year, 75-percent enterprise zone tax abatement for the geospatial imagery company as part of a comprehensive financial package being put together by the Ohio Department of Development.

The hope is the financial package will be enough to convince the company to expand in Wooster, as opposed sites in Southfield, Mich., and Fort Collins, Colo., where it also has facilities.

"I'm whole-heartedly in favor of this," said Councilman Keith Topovski, D-Ward 2. "We've talked a lot about economic development over the past few years and what it means to help our local businesses. We talk about retaining businesses and growing new businesses out at BioHio. Well, this is a business that was incubated here in Wooster out of the founder's garage and kitchen. Everything here is a positive. These are good-paying, high-tech jobs with good benefits. This is something we all have o support and I look forward to passing this tonight."

In its expansion, TGS would construct a \$6 million, 30,000-square-foot facility identical to its current building. In addition, the company would commit toward creating 150 jobs with an average salary of \$12.50, plus benefits, creating an annual payroll of \$3.9 million.

Justin Starlin, assistant to the director of administration, pointed out Southfield has a competitive advantage over Wooster in terms of its workforce with perhaps the largest employee AutoCAD knowledge base in the world.

He also noted many of TechniGraphics' employees are younger and are attracted to Fort Collins because its aesthetics.

Starlin told council taxes on the vacant parcel of land where TGS would build, with the 75 percent abatement, would increase from \$2,300 annually to \$36,000 annually. After the duration of the tax abatement, taxes on the property would bring \$144,000 annually.

Starlin added over the life of the abatement TGS would save more than \$1 million.

Councilman Jon Ulbright, D-at large, said he was "flabbergasted" after reading through the company's benefit package.

"If I was younger, this would make me think about changing careers," said Ulbright, an educator. "Not just the wages, insurance, holidays, flex spending account, 401k profit sharing, tuition reimbursement, as well as the Dell computer, Verizon and flowers discounts. I can remember when the founder first came to Wooster and talked about his program. This is a fine example of a home-grown, American success story, and it's right here in Wooster. If we can pass this tonight, we can outdistance our competitors regardless of their pool of employees or natural beauty. I enthusiastically support this."

Councilman Jon Ansel, R-at large, who sponsored the legislation, said TGS meets all the expedited requirements his laws and ordinances laid out last year for fast-track enterprise zone abatements.

"We established those guidelines to streamline the process and to reward companies that are making commitments to facilities, paying competitive wages and offering competitive benefits packages," Ansel said. "This is really the first test of that criteria. TGS not only meets those, but exceeds all requirements. They don't compete with an existing business in the city, and maybe not even in the world, the wage rate is 82 percent of the highest hourly rate for comparable jobs according to the Tri-County Wage Survey, and their benefits and health care packages are ultra competitive. It shows that human resources is more of the most important parts of their business success."

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