

Compromise best path for city, Idexx

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With city officials planning to meet with representatives of Idexx this week, it appeared there might be room for compromise between the plans for the expansion of the company that manufactures veterinary equipment and the expansion of a neighboring quarry run by Pike Industries.

That's good, because no matter how important Idexx is to the future of Westbrook, the city cannot simply rezone land owned by Pike Industries to block its expansion plans.

Idexx representative shave cast the decision as a matter of vision. They say the quarry and asphalt plant do not fit the vision the city pitched to Idexx in negotiations over keeping the company's \$165 million expansion in Westbrook. That vision was of the Five Star Industrial Park as a home for light – not heavy – industry.

While that is undoubtedly an accurate portrayal of the plan the city laid out, the quarries run by Pike Industry have been in Westbrook for decades. They were certainly there when Idexx was negotiating with the city a few years ago, and the company and city officials admit there was no discussion of rezoning Pike's land during those negotiations. It is actually Idexx's plans that have changed since then – choosing a different location for the company's corporate headquarters.

At the center of this dispute seems to be Idexx's reluctance to build those headquarters next to the site for a proposed asphalt plant. That's understandable. Few of us would want to live or work next to an asphalt plant. Unfortunately, as many in Gorham could attest, they have to be somewhere.

Idexx officials have said it would be difficult to sell the top scientists in the country on coming to work in an office next to an asphalt plant. But, let's be honest, light industry or heavy, and with all due respect to those who punch a time clock on Eisenhower Drive, Maine's scenic coast it is not. It's an industrial park. Luckily, though, that coast is a short drive away, as is downtown Portland and Sebago Lake. Idexx is extremely important to the future of Westbrook. The company expects to invest \$165 millin in the expansion. .With the expansion far from complete, Idexx has already added 600 new jobs. The jobs this brings are of the highest quality, far more important than those that come with a retail expansion.



That's why the city offered Idexx a generous tax increment financing agreement to keep its expansion here, when it has offered none to the developer proposing to build a giant retail center between the Westbrook Arterial and Stroudwater Street. In return for its commitment to the city, Idexx will get two-thirds of its taxes back on its investment.

That's why it's also in the company's best interest to find a compromise, not to mention the fact that Pike isn't likely to walk away from its land. Any attempt by the city to rezone Pike's property would almost certainly be challenged by the company in court, and that's a fight Pike might very well win.

- *Brendan Morin, editor, American Journal*