



City, Idexx, Pike seek compromise on expansion

By Leslie Bridgers
Reporter-American Journal

WESTBROOK (April 3): Negotiations among Idexx Laboratories, Pike Industries and the city of Westbrook are continuing this week, as the City Council tries to find a way for both companies to expand.

"We want both of them. We need both of them," said Council President Brendan Rielly about the two companies that are both trying to expand their operations on abutting properties between Spring and Saco streets.

Rielly, Mayor Bruce Chuluda, City Administrator Jerre Bryant and Councilor Drew Gattine, who is the chairman of the City Council's Committee of the Whole, expected to meet with representatives from Idexx this week to talk about a possible compromise. A specific date and time had not been set early this week.

In the fall, Pike came to the city with plans to build an asphalt plant at the site of its Spring Street quarry. Soon after, Idexx, a biotechnology firm specializing in veterinary product research, development and manufacturing, decided to halt its plans to build a corporate headquarters – which would bring several hundred jobs to the city – on its neighboring property.

In response to the conflict, Mayor Bruce Chuluda proposed rezoning Five Star Industrial Park, Westbrook Heights Business Park and neighboring properties between Spring and Saco streets from industrial to light manufacturing, which would prevent Pike from expanding, but ease Idexx's concerns about building its headquarters next to an asphalt plant.

Last week, the Committee of the Whole tabled the mayor's request in order to continue talking to both companies about ways to make both expansions work.

"It's always been my goal to find a mutually agreeable solution to this," Chuluda said Tuesday. However, he said, he still thinks it "makes sense to rezone the industrial park."

Rielly said he doesn't think there's support from the City Council at this point to prevent Pike from following through with its plans. But if Idexx is willing to consider continuing its expansion if certain protective measures are taken by Pike, "we've got a lot to talk about," he said.

According to Jonathan Olson, regional manager for Pike, the asphalt plant planned is "state of the art" with the "latest technologies" in protective measures for keeping noise and odor to a minimum. He said dust from truck traffic is not a concern because all passageways will be paved. Olson said there are also plans to create landscaped berms that would block the plant from view of people passing by.

"We're willing to look at all the options," Olson said about possibilities for preventing the plant from disturbing Idexx's expansion plans. Olson said he sent a letter to Idexx requesting a meeting between the two companies but has yet to receive a response.

Dick Daigle, director of facilities management for Idexx, said he had not seen the letter, but that the company is "looking forward to working with everyone for a solution."

"We're still trying to understand what our options are," Daigle said Tuesday.

Though no decisions were made at last week's meeting, Rielly said he was "encouraged" by conversations he's had with both companies since then.

Olson said he "was pleased with the way the meeting went," but is still unsure of what the end result will be.

"It's a little too early to be optimistic," he said.