

Development/Company hopes to buy MacFarlane land

Continued from 1A

Ford said his firm hasn't yet launched a public process, but it's seeking to buy 175 acres of land owned by the MacFarlane family—about 140 acres of which are in the town of Rock just outside of Janesville city limits.

The property, including about 35 acres of which is active farmland, is adjacent to portions of the city's south side industrial park and is bookended by dozens of homes in residential subdivisions to the north and south.

Ford said it could take years to fully develop the parcel, but the initial development would be a 65-acre industrial greenhouse by Local Roots. That's a California-based agricultural company that says it uses European practices including water conservation technology in what the company describes as hydroponic indoor farming of a variety of produce, including lettuce and strawberries.

A Local Roots official is among those Ford said intend to attend the neighborhood open house Tuesday afternoon at Jackson Elementary, 441 W. Burbank Ave.

Ford said the developer plans to show guests illustrations and site plans, give summaries of projects proposed and flesh out how the development will be connected to neighboring areas, along with lighting and green space plans.

The open house also will yield clues, he said, about the timeline of the project moving past land acquisition and a due diligence



A 175-acre swath of land on Janesville's south side that for decades has housed part of a local pheasant farm could house a new, landmark development—one that would start with a hydroponic industrial greenhouse operation but later could include new homes and apartments and several parcels geared for light- to medium-duty industry.

phases and into public zoning processes, which would include a request for the city to annex the MacFarlane Pheasants land that's in the town of Rock into the city of Janesville.

He said Three Leaf Partners has been working with the city and with property owners for a year to put together a plan. Zoning and other development considerations haven't rolled out yet in the public sphere.

The open house Tuesday is being held by the Three Leaf Partners, but the city of Janesville circulated a notice of the event late this

week of a possible quorum of Janesville City Council members who could attend to check out presentations.

The city's planning department and the city manager's office did not respond to Gazette inquiries Thursday on the city's involvement in the emerging development.

Bill MacFarlane, who owns and operates MacFarlane Pheasants, a family-run operation of about 60 employees in Janesville, told The Gazette this week that he's working to sell the parcel on the northeast corner of Highways 11 and 51, which is just part of

hundreds of acres the family uses on the south side to house multiple arrays of netted enclosures that hold pheasants the farm raises.

MacFarlane said he's made it clear to his employees that he has no intention of folding up shop in Janesville, one of several Wisconsin cities where the family has operated pheasant farms since the late 1920s.

He said interest in pheasants and pheasant hunting peaked during the COVID-19 pandemic as outdoor hobbies flourished. MacFarlane's seen an uptick in demand for his company's farmed pheasants ever since.

MacFarlane said his company is exploring finding local acreage to move part of its operation after it sells off the land at Highway 11 and Highway 51.

"We haven't decided where that will be, but it'll be somewhere around here. We're not leaving, I want to make that very clear," he said.

Ford didn't provide images or renderings this week, but he said the public will be able to see many of the conceptual elements of the proposal on Tuesday—parts of which he said could take years to develop.

Overall, Ford said, the intention is to site

DEVELOPMENT MEETING

What: Neighborhood open house for 175-acre development with a hydroponic greenhouse.
Who: Hosted by Three Leaf Partners of Milwaukee.
When: 4:30 to 6 p.m. Tuesday, April 12.
Where: Jackson Elementary School, 441 W. Burbank Ave., enter through door No. 3.
The site: MacFarlane Pheasants farm area along highways 11 and 51.

single-family housing contiguous to a residential neighborhood north of the proposed industrial part of the development.

The plan includes "affordable" multifamily housing, such as apartments, as an option.

Three Leaf Partners is extensively involved in affordable housing projects throughout Wisconsin, according to its portfolio of developments. Typically, housing defined as affordable is subsidized by federal and sometimes local grants and is restricted to people with income levels indexed to the county median.

"We really feel a tremendous need for the community is for affordable, multifamily housing," Ford said.

About 56 acres of the southern expanse where MacFarlane now operates the pheasant farm would be sectioned off for multiple industrial uses, and the rest of the land would support the hydroponic operation.

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