

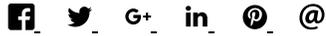


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EDITOR'S PICK

County superintendent talks tax revenues

Sarah Pavlik-Hernandez Jan 13, 2018



Talk of the new Toyota-Mazda plant to be built in Huntsville-annexed Limestone County dominated much of the Limestone County School Board meeting Thursday night.

Superintendent Dr. Tom Sisk provided the board with an overview of the revenue that the system can expect during the construction phases of the \$1.6-billion Toyota-Mazda plant and the \$115-million BOCAR plant. BOCAR, a German auto parts manufacturer, is slated to begin construction on another Huntsville-annexed piece of Limestone County property this spring.

Although Toyota-Mazda has been promised a 20-year tax incentive by state and local governments at the tune of nearly \$700 million, the company cannot avoid a 1-cent constitutional sales tax. On Tuesday, the Huntsville City Council approved a \$320-million tax incentive package and on Jan. 16, the Limestone County Commission will vote on a \$3-million tax package that will also benefit the automobile manufacturer.

Despite the abatements, Sisk said that he estimates the constitutional tax will capture just more than \$16 million in revenue from the Toyota-Mazda plant during its construction phase over the next 30 months. That revenue will be split between the Athens City and Limestone County school districts.

Currently, LCS gets 69 percent of the pie, while ACS receives the other 31 percent. Those percentages are based on student enrollment numbers and can vary from year to year.

"Based on what (Limestone County Commission Chairman Mark) Yarbrough has said to me the first stage of construction will be moving dirt," Sisk said. "That is not the time the biggest revenues come in. We may see a half-million dollars from Toyota by this summer."

"The majority of the money should start coming in October when they begin the construction of the plant," he added.

Once the factory begins production in 2021, Sisk said that the Department of Commerce estimates that Toyota-Mazda will generate up to \$10 million in constitutional tax revenues annually. Those revenues will be divided between Madison City Schools, Huntsville City Schools, ACS and LCS, with the county garnering the largest share at 60-64 percent.

As for BOCAR, Sisk said that most of the money from the construction and equipping phase of the plant will be seen between now and this time next year. He noted that of the \$42.7 million in construction costs, LCS will see \$854,000, and of the \$66.2 million in equipment costs, his district will get around \$660,000.

Despite the rosy projections, Sisk said he wants to take things slow.

"My gut feeling right now is to not do anything and look at the spreadsheet and know where we are," Sisk said. "I want to make sure that any of the developments we pursue are done comfortably."

"The decisions we make will affect this system for the next 40-50 years," he added.

He also said that he wants to focus on wooing as many support factories to the county as possible, reminding the board that "we don't get a dime from anything that is built on the Madison side."

"We have nine Title I schools, the money and jobs generated by Toyota-Mazda and the other plants that will follow them could take us out of the Title I business for good," he said.

Schools with Title I status have high percentages of children from low-income families.

Other business

The board unanimously approved to renew an \$8,000 contract with Mental Health Care of North Central Alabama to provide counselors for at-risk students. However, Dr. Brad Lewis, the county's executive director of curriculum, said that they are "working on moving away from this contract and shifting to an in-house mental health care system."

The board also approved the purchase of additional Advanced Placement biology books to accommodate the growing number of county students participating in AP classes.

Board member Earl Glaze also expressed his growing concern that delayed expense reimbursements have become a burden to county employees.

"I'm hearing of incidents of teachers going to a conference and it taking the system six weeks to pay them (mileage reimbursements)," he said. "Another incident was brought to my attention where an employee turned in an expense report in November and their check didn't come until today."

Both Glaze and the board's president Charles Shoulders suggested that the clunky approval process might be streamlined somehow. Sisk agreed to look into the matter.



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