

Depot has businesses, farmers interested

Many see value in soon-to-be-closed chemical depot

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HERMISTON - Brian Cole calls it "the greatest thing Oregon has."

Cole, a self-described visionary, said Tuesday the Umatilla Chemical Depot is the largest unzoned parcel in the state.

He spoke to about 15 business representatives who met with government officials at the depot to discuss the options and develop some ideas for future use.

Phillip Ferguson, the depot's base transition coordinator, narrated a 2 1/2-hour tour around the 19,728-acre site, which the Army will close after the last mustard ton container is destroyed.

The demilitarization contractor, Global Security Group, expects to finish destroying chemical weapons in 2011.

Ferguson pointed out two areas that will require environmental cleanup. He said the Army will meet all the requirements of its permits. Umatilla County Commissioner Bill Hansell said a future owner may face higher cleanup standards, however.

The Local Reuse Authority tentatively has earmarked 40 percent of the depot for economic development, 40 percent for natural resource preservation and 20 percent for military use.

The Oregon National Guard, which already uses the depot for some training,



Phillip Ferguson, base transition coordinator at the Umatilla Chemical Depot, describes the interior of one of the 1,001 igloos. The earth-covered concrete structures maintain a constant temperature of 60-70 degrees inside.
Staff photo by Dean Brickey

Depot numbers

19,728 acres
1,173 workers
1,001 igloos
197 miles of paved road, plus gravel roads
80 antelope
52 miles of light rail
60 percent in Morrow County
40 percent in Umatilla County

Depot tour participants

Eric Brubaker and Bud Barnett of Calvary Harvest Fellowship, Hermiston.
Diane Wolfe, Boardman Chamber of Commerce.
Suzi Frederickson, Frederickson Farming.
Kalvin Garton, LaMonde S. Collier and Gordon Breedmeier, Garton and Associates Realtors.
Virginia Miller, Miller Realty.
Ray McKee, Old Dominion Freight Lines.
Leslie Hasse and Jim Godfrey, Oregon Department of Transportation right-of-way division.
Ray Lam, Silk Road Environmental, Richland, Wash.
John Stahl, Stahl Farms, Stanfield.
John Whitman, Whitman Enterprises, Hermiston.
Nate Rivera, Umatilla Electric Cooperative
Dennis Doherty, Bill Hansell and Connie Caplinger, Umatilla County.

wants to acquire the northern section for a training facility.

About half of those attending Tuesday stayed for a "values mapping" exercise. They discussed the depot's attributes, then grouped them into themes.

The group chose economic development and preserving natural resources as the two most important. Secondary were ensuring environmental stewardship, maintaining a liveable environment and following the LRA plan.

Economic development could involve the chemical disposal plant.

"There is substantial interest in reuse of the demilitarization facility," Ferguson told tour participants. He said the Army plans to destroy the plant and return the land to its original condition. But if the LRA finds a need for some of the buildings, they might be saved. No matter what, he said, the chemical demilitarization building and the pollution control building will be destroyed.

The LRA comprises representatives of Umatilla and Morrow county governments, the ports of Morrow and Umatilla and the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation.

LRA members have hired the Dana Mission Support Team to develop a reuse plan.

Brian Cole, the team's executive director, said Tuesday businesses and others interested in using parts of the depot after it's decommissioned must submit a notice of interest by Nov. 23. Cole said his team expects to complete its plan by next May.

"This is not a fast process," Cole said. "Actually breaking ground and going out and doing something out there is still a long way off."

The group also brainstormed general ideas for future uses. Among them were:

- An interpretive center describing the depot's history.
- Long-term records storage.
- Fairgrounds
- Aquifer recharge and recovery
- Wind farm
- Homeless shelter
- Outlet mall or other business hub near the Interstate 84, I-82 intersection.

- Distribution center.

- Co-generation plant.

Others who want to submit proposals for future depot will find a questionnaire that can be answered anonymously and notice of interest packets at www.missionumatilla.com.