

Depot captures attention of farmers, businesses

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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, wants to acquire the northern section for a training facility.

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.

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.

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.