

Canton trying to find new site for growing biotech company

By Elaine Cushman Carroll, Globe Correspondent | August 2, 2007

CANTON -- After a three-week whirlwind courtship, the owners of a much-touted biotech company have determined that moving into the Plymouth Rubber industrial site in Canton can't happen quickly enough to meet their needs.

Officials from Organogenesis Inc., currently at 150 Dan Road in Canton, say they are still considering other sites in Canton, in line with their agreement with the state to stay in Massachusetts.

Governor Deval Patrick made the company -- which makes an artificial skin product, Apligraf -- the centerpiece of his recent \$1 billion, 10-year life science initiative. The effort aims to keep Organogenesis and other biomedical firms in state and growing.

Organogenesis, which plans to double its workforce to nearly 500 within five years, was singled out for its commitment to expand in Massachusetts after having received offers to move out of state. The state has offered the company a \$12.9 million incentive package to help it move to its new site and an additional \$5 million in low-interest loans.

Canton officials have been working to keep the company not only within the state, but within the town.

At first, moving to the old [Plymouth Rubber Co.](#) site looked possible. But in the end, "our timeline is a bit too aggressive to approach that site," said Chris O'Reilly, director of engineering for Organogenesis. He said the company would like to have the shell of a new building constructed in about a year.

"If all the stars aligned maybe we could have met the timeline at Plymouth Rubber. It's too bad; it's a very interesting site with the river, the viaduct, and the train station," he said.

"The town's been very supportive. We wanted to get back to them on this very quickly. We definitely would like to stay in Canton," O'Reilly said.

Meanwhile, Napleton LLC, owner of the roughly 40 acres of property that for decades housed the historic Plymouth Rubber Co., is going ahead with plans to develop the site. It had presented two preliminary plans to the town's Planning Board -- one calling for about 450 units of housing and three Organogenesis buildings, and another calling for roughly 650 units of housing, with some limited retail and office space, according to its lawyer, Paul A. Schneiders.

Schneiders said Organogenesis approached Napleton about a month ago and Napleton agreed to

develop a plan that scaled down its housing units.

Napleton was "trying to be accommodating because they know how much Canton wants to hold on to Organogenesis," Schneiders said.

Selectmen chairman Bob Burr said the new facility at Plymouth Rubber on Revere Street would have netted the town as much as \$200,000 a year in taxes and added roughly 270 skilled jobs. With the defeat of a nearly \$4 million Proposition 2 1/2 override last year, which led to deep cuts in town services and school programs, it is important that the town not lose any more of its business base, he said.

Canton, intersected by major highways and a short commute to Boston, is home to such large companies as [Reebok International](#), and Dunkin' Brands.

At a selectmen's meeting last week, Burr said Organogenesis was still considering four sites in Canton, but said they were tentative and could not be disclosed yet.

Gene Manning, president of the town's Economic Development Committee, said local business groups have been lobbying to keep the company in town.

"We're still working with them and the state to come up with additional sites in Canton. My primary focus is to keep them in town. They're a real top-notch company," he said.

Planning Board chairman George Jenkins said he doubts that Organogenesis had a "warm and fuzzy feeling" after the Planning Board meeting during which the Plymouth Rubber site plans were revealed. The board issued a split vote -- 3 to 2 -- in favor of having the company included in the Plymouth Rubber development. But O'Reilly, of Organogenesis, said he felt that even the people who didn't vote for the concept were very supportive of the company.

Organogenesis, which will outgrow its 80,000 square feet of manufacturing space by 2010, is said to be expanding roughly 30 percent a year, largely due to the sales of Apligraf. The product, which uses human donor cells, is used primarily to treat venous leg ulcers and diabetic foot ulcers, ailments that can lead to amputations or even death.

O'Reilly declined to comment on other possible locations, but said that staying in Canton is a priority because about 80 percent of the company's employees lives within 10 miles.

Meanwhile, Schneiders said the Plymouth Rubber site developers will be back before town officials soon with plans for about 650 apartments.

He said some of the apartments will be set aside for those over age 55, and could be sold as condominiums if the market changes. The proposal will also include small stores and office space.

The plan will have to go before Town Meeting for approval of zoning that will allow mixed-use development. "The only real issue," Schneiders said, "is going to be density."

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