

***City gets big grant for tech center***  
***HERMITAGE, PA***  
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***\$4 mil earmarked for LindenPointe***

By Joe Pinchot  
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For the second time, the federal government has awarded Hermitage a grant to further its efforts to create a technology-oriented business and education community at LindenPointe technical business park.



*An artist's rendering shows the proposed tech center at LindenPointe. Hermitage received a \$4 million federal grant to help build the center.*

Commerce Secretary Gary Locke announced Monday that the city has been awarded a \$4.2 million grant through the U.S. Economic

Development Administration to help build a technology innovation and development center, which will be a companion to the training and workforce development building that recently, was completed in LindenPointe, on South Hermitage Road.

"It's really been a long journey," City Manager Gary P. Hinkson said. "It is an example of persevering and working with other economic development entities at the state and federal levels, as well as the local level. There's been a tremendous amount of time involved in getting us to the award."

The federal grant will be added to \$1.25 million from the state that Gov. Edward G. Rendell announced in August 2008. The city previously received two state grants: \$25,000 for design and \$98,000 to coordinate private industry partners who contributed to the design. The city also will have about \$250,000 wrapped up in the project for engineering, design, inspection and administration, said Assistant City Manager Gary M. Gulla.

EDA previously awarded the city \$800,000, which, added to \$500,000 in city funds, was used to build the workforce building.

Locke noted city officials predicted the tech center could create 100 jobs and generate \$10 million in private investment, numbers based on assumptions about incubator tenants, similar facilities in the region and other investments at LindenPointe.

"This grant will help create higher-skill, living-wage jobs by building a facility that will train workers in the skills needed to compete for jobs in the emerging semiconductor, electronics, biomedical and biotechnical sectors," Locke said in a press release posted at the EDA Web site.

The tech center will put the region “a step ahead of surrounding areas as green technology and life sciences continue to advance rapidly,” said Denise McCloskey, executive director of the Northwest Pennsylvania Regional Planning and Development Commission, in comments provided by the city.

The project evolved as a way to diversify the local economy, prepare workers for global competition and try something beyond the realm of existing economic development efforts, Gulla said.

The tech center effort has been coordinated by an unofficial committee made up of Hinkson, Gulla, Larry Reichard of Penn-Northwest Development Corp., Angela M. Palumbo of Pennsylvania CareerLink, Rex W. Knisley of First National Bank of Pennsylvania— Ms. Palumbo and Knisley also serve on the Hermitage Community and Economic Development Commission — and staff members of the Northwest Commission.

“You can do this or do nothing and hope that something falls out of the sky,” Hinkson said. “We hope the impact of this will be felt for years.” “Hermitage is poised to be a new hub of technology and economic growth in our region,” said U.S. Rep. Kathy Dahlkemper, D-3rd District, Erie. “Hopefully, it will serve as a catalyst for other development, particularly at LindenPointe, but also elsewhere,” Reichard, executive director of Penn-Northwest, said.

The site will be another tool Penn-Northwest, Mercer County’s lead economic development agency, can use to try to attract business and industry looking to locate in the county. He noted a technology sector business contacted him Monday, and he plans to send information about the center to the company.

The fact that Hermitage has received a second EDA grant — Mercer County had not previously received EDA funding since the tornado of 1985 — is significant, Reichard said. “I can honestly say that I do not ever remember EDA providing such a large grant to our region,” Ms. McCloskey said. “This is testament to the hard work and foresight of the folks in Hermitage and the surrounding areas.” Officials believe the tech center has implications beyond Mercer County.

Sam Giannetti of the West Central Workforce Investment Board, which serves Mercer and Lawrence counties, has said the tech center is important to the OH-PENN Interstate Region, an economic development consortium made up of Mercer and Lawrence counties in Pennsylvania and Trumbull, Mahoning and Columbiana counties in Ohio.

Two other consortiums of counties, one in northwest Pennsylvania and the other in southwest Pennsylvania, also contributed to the project, and the Ohio-Pennsylvania connection spanned two federal regions. “The technology center is an important component in the regional strategy that seeks to establish Mercer County with its Ohio and Pennsylvania interstate collaborators as the ‘belt buckle’ of the technology corridor stretching from Cleveland to Pittsburgh, by creating resources to enhance worker skills for 21st century industries,” Giannetti said in comments provided by the city.

Gulla said the OH-PENN involvement “took this project to the top of the priority list.” The 15,000-square-foot tech center will house a testing laboratory for use by high-tech companies, five to seven technology business incubators for companies — two of 1,000 square feet and the rest half that size — and common class, break, meeting, locker and rest room areas. The classroom will have teleconferencing equipment.

City officials said businesses not housed in the tech center or LindenPointe could use the testing

equipment. That component could be important in retaining existing area businesses and attracting new ones, Reichard said.

The electronic equipment specifications were developed by Novocell Semiconductor, Hermitage; Cattron Group Inc., Sharpsville; Wintronics, Sharon; and Pine Instruments, Pine Township. The city is seeking additional funding for more electronic equipment.

Local officials tailored their application to respond to federal suggestions, most notably by agreeing to put up a building that is designed under the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design program. The “green” building will need to meet standards set by the U.S. Green Building Council, which promotes environmentally friendly design and supply choices.

There are no such green-certified buildings in Mercer County, although a new Pennsylvania National Guard armory that has been proposed for Hermitage would be certified.

HHS DR Architects/Engineers, Sharon, is designer of the tech center and the armory. City officials hope to have the bidding specifications complete next month, with construction beginning as early as April.

LindenPointe is a joint venture between the city and developer Frederick George, who each owned roughly half of the 115-acre park when development began. While George’s section has attracted mainly medical and professional offices, the city’s part has stricter zoning guidelines that aim to attract businesses in the computer, communication, scientific, robotics, testing and related industries, and educational facilities.

Current tenants on the city’s half are Novocell Semiconductor, which recently signed a lease to locate in the workforce building; Information Resource Technology Inc., a software development and support company, primarily for retail bookstores; and Butler County Community College, which has announced plans to buy, renovate and expand the building it has leased from Subscribers Encouraging Economic Development Inc., and buy land for future growth.

Wallace and Pancher Inc., an environmental consulting, design and construction firm on South Hermitage Road is considered part of the park and has aided the city’s economic development efforts.

The park’s roads and utilities were built with a state grant, and the city has obtained two other state grants to build walking trails.

Information: [www.lindenpointe.com](http://www.lindenpointe.com)