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Advertise it for sale and see value, SPA told regarding 'megaport' property

By Lee Hinnant
Staff Writer

A local environmental group that has been pushing for a state park on land near Southport once eyed for a megaport has devised a new strategy.

The non-profit Save the Cape Inc. is now encouraging the N.C. State Ports Authority to actively market the 600-acre site on the west side of the Cape Fear River. If no one purchases it within a year, then the authority could offer it to the state Division of Parks and Recreation.



Save the Cape and other groups fought plans for a major new port on the site, adjacent to Archer Daniels Midland's citric acid plant. Earlier this year, Save the Cape unveiled conceptual plans for a state park, along with an economic impact study that stated the project could create 169 full-time jobs and have an annual economic impact of \$5.7-million.

Mike Rice and Toby Bronstein of Save the Cape said the park idea has stalled because of a lack of local political support.

“They’ve been pushing this land as highly marketable,” Bronstein said. “It’s time for a reality check.”

When Save the Cape first approached Secretary of Transportation Tony Tata about the park plan, Tata said Gov. Pat McCrory listened to the proposal but wanted to consider alternatives,

Rice said.

“We’d like to see them list it for sale,” Rice said. “In the eyes of the ports authority, this speaks to what they can really get for the property.”

The authority paid \$30-million for the land. The most recent appraisal set its value at \$15-million.

Bronstein called it a “let them fail” strategy that could encourage a more serious look at the state park proposal. She said she was confident that a major industry would not locate at the site, which lacks roads, rail or other infrastructure. The trend in Brunswick County instead has been investments in residential and commercial developments such as Ocean Ridge Plantation, St. James Plantation, Brunswick Forest and now, The Charles.

“There hasn’t been a major new industrial development since 1976, but the Brunswick County commissioners won’t realize that,” she said.

Save the Cape has drafted a resolution for the ports authority to consider, and broached the topic at a recent board meeting in Morehead City. Rice said staff already was looking into recommendations for dealing with unused property.