



This copy is for your personal, noncommercial use only. You can order presentation-ready copies for distribution to your colleagues, clients or customers [here](#) or use the "Reprints" tool that appears above any article. [Order a reprint of this article now.](#)

N.C. ports asked to use mega port land for park

*By Bruce Smith
Associated Press*

Published: Thursday, July 25, 2013 at 1:37 p.m.

An environmental group urged North Carolina's ports authority board Thursday to let the state create a new park on 600 acres of land the authority had originally intended for a mega container port near Southport. In return, the panel was told, lawmakers might be convinced to provide some appropriations for the agency to help retire debt and for capital projects.

"It's an opportunity that goes beyond being a good corporate neighbor and a good corporate citizen," Toby Bronstein of the environmental group Save the Cape told the board of the North Carolina State Ports Authority.

The authority had spent about \$30 million on the property along the Cape Fear River north of Southport. It had planned the container port to handle the supersize container ships that will call routinely at the nation's ports when the widened Panama Canal is open to shipping traffic in two years.

But the project was put on hold three years ago because of public opposition, in part led by Save the Cape, and after state lawmakers refused to pay for a \$10 million feasibility study for the port. The terminal itself was expected to cost upward to \$3 billion.

Mike Rice, also from Save the Cape, said Brunswick County has plenty of other industrial sites and added that DAK Americans is closing its Wilmington plant in September, putting another 1,600 acres of land on the market. Turning the land over for a state park "would give the state some incentive to providing funds to the authority for capital projects."

The agency does not get state appropriations. A resolution supporting the park concept was referred to a board committee.

Board member George Rountree said the authority has a lot tied up in the land and wondered "who is going to buy it for \$30 million?"

"The concept is to get some value from it," Rice replied. "Perhaps you won't get \$30 million, but let's see what we can do."

"Some members of the board are very sympathetic to doing something with the property rather than creating a super port," Rountree agreed.

Bronstein said advocates of the idea plan to approach local governments and state lawmakers but the first step was to bring the idea to the authority because it owns the land. She said there hasn't been a new state park created in North Carolina in four years and while Brunswick County is one of the largest in the state, it has no state park.

Secretary of Transportation Anthony Tata told the board he would discuss the concept with Gov. Pat McCrory.

Authority board member Michael Lee suggested more might be done with the land than just creating a park.

"There is not going to be a single silver bullet for this project," he said. "It needs to be drilled down as a business plan."

After the meeting, Bronstein said she was encouraged by the board's response.

"The irony of the Ports Authority and Save the Cape being on the same side doesn't escape me, but it's wonderful," she said. "It's a partnership that could bring tremendous value to the state."

Copyright © 2013 StarNewsOnline.com — All rights reserved. Restricted use only.