

## Authority to keep port site, opponents' concerns remain

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For the foreseeable future, the N.C. State Ports Authority plans to hold onto the 600 acres near Southport it purchased for a huge international port.

That has opponents of the proposed N.C. International Terminal concerned that construction of a port facility is still very possible there, even as officials say the project isn't moving forward.

Adding to the concern is that nobody – from Gov. Bev Perdue's office down – will say the NCIT project is officially dead.

Instead, state officials say, they're awaiting the results of a thorough look into the state's transportation and logistics needs by the Governor's Logistics Task Force, a panel of public officials and private industry representatives appointed by Perdue and led by Lt. Gov. Walter Dalton. Whether a deepwater port – much larger than existing facilities in Wilmington and Morehead City – should be part of the state's future is likely to be addressed in the task force's recommendations.

Members of Save the Cape, a nonprofit group formed recently to protect the Cape Fear from potentially harmful development, met this week with state Commerce Secretary Keith Crisco and other state officials, in part to try to learn about plans for the land.

About five years ago, the Ports Authority purchased the property – with 4,000 feet of Cape Fear River access and zoned for heavy industry – from Pfizer Inc. for \$30 million. The Ports Authority considered that piece of property perhaps the most suitable, available tract on the East Coast for development of an international container shipping port.

Shannon Moody, a Ports Authority spokeswoman, said Thursday that the authority continues to pay debt service and maintain the property.

"There are no intentions to sell the property at this time," Moody wrote in response to questions. "The options for the property are for industrial use (as it is currently zoned), and the Ports Authority continues to believe this acreage to be prime land for industrial development."

Moody said the land costs are paid from authority operating revenues and no state appropriations are expected to be used to cover the cost of purchasing or maintaining it. Between April 2006 and June 2010, the authority spent \$3.7 million on the land, including maintenance and interest, she said.

Toby Bronstein of Save the Cape said they were advised in meetings with state officials this week that all options remain on the table for the property, and that the



*Handout photo n.c. state port*  
Proposed North Carolina International Port (CQ) site along the Cape Fear River north of Southport.



state isn't prepared to dispose of it until the future is more certain.

"With that cautionary note from the state, we recognize our work on NCIT is not yet done, and won't be until the land is either sold or transferred to another state agency," Bronstein said.

Crisco, the commerce secretary, said it's too early to say what the future will hold for that 600 acres, but he indicated it wouldn't be wise to sell it now.

"It's a valuable piece of land, but it's probably not worth that today because of the real estate market," he said. "Since everything's on the table, we don't feel a burning need to eliminate one option."

Aside from a deepwater port, preliminary suggested uses for that land include preserving it as a park or national seashore or developing an energy park to showcase different renewable or alternative energy sources. And as the state looks at the potential development of offshore energy resources, particularly wind, the tract could be used as a potential place to bring those resources ashore.

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