

Cement plant gets \$320 million

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The state Economic Development Authority has given preliminary approval to a \$320 million bond issue that would help Essroc Cement Corp. build a new cement plant at its existing Martinsburg location.

Construction of the plant is expected to begin this spring. It will create up to 250 construction jobs, retain 150 jobs and may provide additional jobs in the future, according to a press release from the West Virginia Development Office.

Gov. Joe Manchin said in a prepared statement, "An expansion of this magnitude represents faith in West Virginia's economic climate and I am extremely pleased to make this announcement."

The bonds will be taxable and will be paid off with revenue generated by the plant.

The development authority gave preliminary approval to the bonds by unanimous voice vote. Later, during a public comment session, Steve White of the Affiliated Construction Trades Foundation said he had contacted a representative of the cement company about whether the firm will hire local people. White said he has not received any commitments.

"It's uncertain what will happen here," said White, whose foundation represents construction unions.

Also Thursday, the authority agreed to review the 48 West Virginia Economic Development Grant Committee projects at next month's meeting. The authority is the administrator of the grant program.

In other action, the authority agreed to allocate:

\$40.7 million in tax-free bonds to BPB America Inc., which is planning to build a wallboard plant south of Moundsville. This is in addition to \$25 million in tax-free bonds the authority agreed to allocate last year.

\$5 million in tax-free bonds to help the Beckley Water Co. Inc. upgrade its water treatment system and take over the town of Sophia's water system.

\$4 million in tax-free bonds to Thomas, Bennett & Hunter Inc. for a concrete batch plant in Berkeley County. The company had received approval for the bonds last year but could not complete the deal in 2005. So the company relinquished the allocation last year and reapplied.

The authority gave preliminary approval to:

A \$765,000 loan to Tech-Seal Products Inc. of Schaumburg, Ill., to help the company buy new equipment for its plant in Wheeling.

A \$319,500 loan to McDaniel Hardwood Products Limited Liability Co. to buy equipment and a building in Kearneysville.

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