PORTS PANEL BACKS INTERSTATE EXIT

Project would provide anticipated transportation infrastructure.

The Jasper Ocean Terminal's bi-state board voted Tuesday to support the proposed Exit 3 off Interstate 95 to serve the future

ERINN **MCGUIRE** HARDEEVILLE

facility.

The Jasper Ocean Terminal Joint Project Office (JPO) Board of Directors, which includes officials from South Carolina and Georgia, made the decision in its first official meeting.

The board met at Hardeeville City Hall in Jasper County.

The \$121.6 million Exit 3 project includes other area road improvements in addition to a new interchange on Interstate 95.

JPO Chairman William L. Bethea Jr. of Hilton Head Island said, "The Exit 3 project could help us begin to address the inland transportation challenges."

Jasper County and the city of Hardeeville are sponsoring the proposal, which seeks funding from the S.C. State Infrastructure Bank.

In the past, the infrastructure bank has mostly provided funding for Charleston-area projects. The



Erinn McGuire / Hardeeville Today

proposed Exit 3 project would be the first of its kind in a rural area, said Ted Felder, Hardeeville's economic development director.

The project would create nearly 4,000 construction jobs within five vears and as many as 28,000 new jobs and \$956 million in new wages over the course of 30 years, Felder said.

Jasper County is considered one of the six most distressed counties in South Carolina, with about 25 percent of its 23,000 residents living below the poverty line, Felder told the board.

Also, more than half of Jasper

County's work force is employed outside the county.

> "This project will be significant for the entire region." Felder said.

RiverPort

As part of the Exit 3 proposal, a spokesman for the Dallas-based Stratford Co. said the 5,000acre RiverPort project is ready to capitalize on the existing Georgia port's business by providing land for future distribution and warehousing operations.

The conceptual master plan provides for 15.5 million square feet of industrial space. Phase 1 of the 1,400-acre business park - a 342acre parcel closest to the Port of Savannah - is for sale.

The RiverPort property also includes a 2,060-acre residential village at the most northern part of the property, located north of Interstate 95, and a 1,006-acre commercial village.

It's estimated that by 2018, the Georgia port will reach its full capacity of 6.5 million TEUs (the metal containers seen on the back of tractor-trailer trucks).

"That capacity has to take a quantum leap," and the RiverPort property is ready to provide space in South Carolina, said Stratford spokesman Chuck Mitchell of Maloney, Mitchell and Denton.

Mitchell also highlighted that a CSX rail line runs through the property and CSX is willing to discuss activating existing rail lines for potential businesses.

Steve Green, chairman of the Georgia Ports Authority board, said the project – coupled with the prospect of a new trade park in Jasper County – has the potential to boost the regional economy on both sides of the river.

"This is a river that joins us rather than divides us," Green said. "I'm looking forward to the time when we will be known as a shipping region with three strong ports unlike anything else in the country."

Other transportation planning work is under way. Last fall, the JPO hired the engineering firm Moffatt & Nichol to assist with work on the project, such as ongoing infrastructure planning.

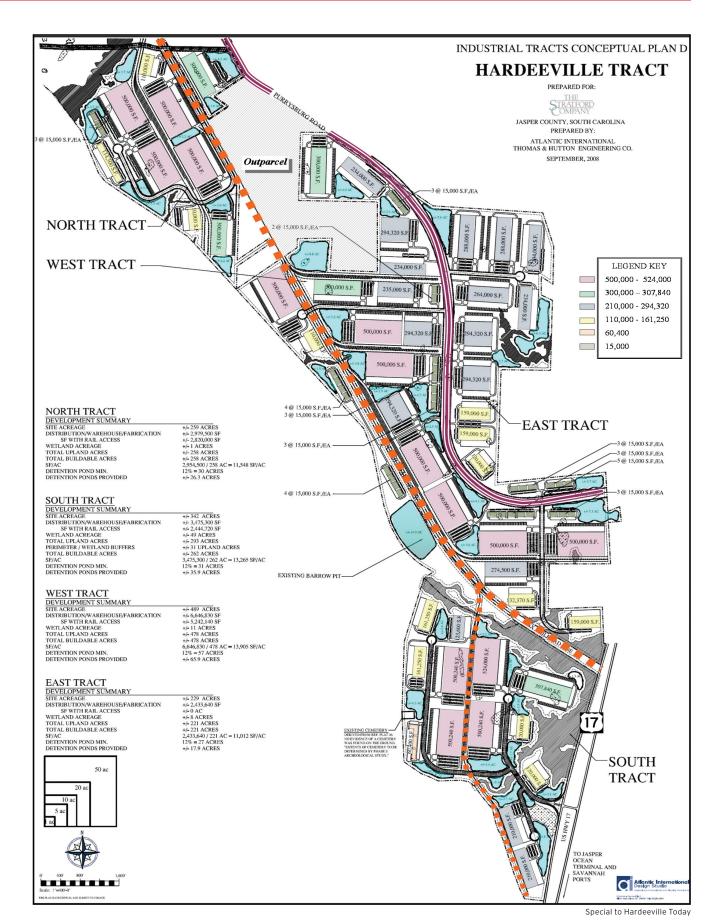
In addition to the Exit 3 interchange, the proposal calls for expansion of Purrysburg Road from two to four lanes from I-95 southbound to U.S. 17, an east-west connector roadway from Purrysburg Road to U.S. 321, and intersection improvements at U.S. 321 and U.S. 17, and U.S. 170 and U.S. 17.

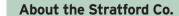
Hardeeville has applied for more than \$68 million from the infrastructure bank, to include a 44 percent local match of \$53 million.

Savannah Morning News reporter Mary Carr Mayle contributed to this story.

About the JPO board

The six-member board of directors of the Jasper Ocean Terminal Joint Project Office consists of two members appointed by each of the states' governors and two members appointed by each port's board chair from his board of directors. Additionally, a member from each governor's staff serves as an ex-officio, nonvoting member, as do Georgia Ports Executive Director Doug Marchand and interim South Carolina Ports Authority President John F. Hassell III. Members are William L. Bethea, Hassell, Dave J. Posek, Bill Stern and Brandon Gaskins, all of South Carolina, From Georgia are James S. Balloun, Steve Green, Jim Lientz, Marchand and Alec Poitevint.





The Stratford Co. is an equity fund and land investment firm headquartered in Dallas, Texas. The company manages a portfolio of unimproved land holdings in Arizona, Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina and Texas. They own the RiverPort business park in Hardeeville. The property includes 1,400 acres parallel to U.S. 17 south of downtown Hardeeville. The first 350-acre parcel, closest to Savannah's port, is for sale, the company

According to Mark MacDonald, a partner with the Stratford Co.: "Situated within 6.5 miles of the Port of Savannah and with its convenient access to ground, rail and sea, RiverPort's location is poised to become one of the most significant warehousing, distribution and light industrial centers in the Southeast."

