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Boone County Commission approves tax break for Northwest Medical Isotopes

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The Boone County Commission didn't need much convincing Thursday before giving Northwest Medical Isotopes final approval for a tax break.

Commissioners voted without prior discussion to approve the company's Chapter 100 application to build a \$108 million medical radioisotope production plant in Columbia. Northwest will receive a 50 percent property tax abatement from Boone County and its taxing districts for 10 years.

Northwest Medical Isotopes plans to create 104 new jobs at an average pay of \$35 an hour. The performance agreement with the county requires the company hire at least 85 employees. The company is required to report to the Commission each year the number of its employees and wages as a condition of the Chapter 100 agreement.

Chapter 100 industrial bonds allow cities or counties to purchase or pay for projects with bond proceeds and then lease or sell the project back to the company. The lease payments are used to retire the bonds. The company receives a tax break on the property during the lease period.

Carolyn Haas, chief operating officer of Northwest Medical Isotopes, said by phone Thursday it hadn't been determined if the company will purchase the bonds when they're issued. She said that's not her area of expertise.

Northwest will produce molybdenum-99 and technetium-99m, used in medical scans for heart disease, cancer and bone and kidney disease. The isotopes have short half-lives, so they can't be stored and must be produced continuously. They have not been produced in the U.S. since the 1980s and there have been shortages.

The company will work with the University of Missouri Research Reactor in producing the isotopes. The plant will be in the university's Discovery Ridge Research Park.

The company plans to start construction next year and start commercial operations in the first quarter of 2021. The company has a construction permit from the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, but it doesn't yet have an operating license.

"We're finalizing our facility design," Haas said with be the next step. She said the company will be very busy preparing to start construction. "We're very excited."

Janet Thompson, District 2 commissioner, said after the meeting the vote was easier than any other Chapter 100 application since she's been on the commission.

"It supports the whole idea of why you would want to bring a business to a community," Thompson said. "It has science-based research. A relationship with the research reactor.

It really does help us say to kids in the community: 'STEM is important,'" she said, referring to science, technology, engineering and math education.

Thompson said Northwest has the real potential to attract other businesses. She said she was initially suspicious of the Chapter 100 as an incentive, but it has proven worthwhile.

"We need to have as many controls put into that as possible," Thompson said.

Presiding Commissioner Dan Atwill said after the meeting that it was an easy vote.

"It's one of the higher-level employment as I have seen in the last six years" Atwill said. "Their investment is significant."

He said the number of employees with high-paying jobs will result in a large payroll. He said employees will buy houses and spend money in the county, resulting in tax revenue.

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