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Cavalier County still has eye on missile site

Six months after losing a bidding battle for the mothballed anti-ballistic-missile complex in Nekoma, N.D., the Cavalier County Jobs Development Authority still is trying to buy the property.

By: **Kevin Bonham**, Grand Forks Herald

Six months after losing a bidding battle for the mothballed anti-ballistic-missile complex in Nekoma, N.D., the Cavalier County Jobs Development Authority still is trying to buy the property.

"The offer remains on the table," said Carol Goodman, executive director of the Langdon, N.D., -based group. "We're waiting for a reply."

The CCJDA has been negotiating for the past two or three months with the Spring Creek Hutterite Colony, the new owners of the Stanley R. Mickelsen Safeguard Complex. The Forbes, N.D., -based colony won the auction in December with a bid of \$530,000.

If they fail to buy the entire complex from Spring Creek, CCJDA officials hope to negotiate the purchase of at least the historic facilities.

The federal government requires that anyone buying the complex preserve for historical purposes the pyramid-shaped radar and other buildings.

"The Hutterite colony will have to live up to the requirements," Goodman said. "Nothing can be done to change the exterior. The appearance cannot be changed at all. That lends itself to historic preservation."

The historical buildings make up about one-third of the 431-acre complex. The rest is farmland, which CCJDA officials figure is the main reason the Spring Creek colony made the purchase.

The State Historic Preservation Office has been involved in the process, according to Goodman. However, officials at its Bismarck office were not available for comment Friday.

Numerous calls from the Herald to the Spring Creek colony over the past several weeks have been referred to a law firm in South Dakota. The law firm has not responded to inquiries.

Economic plan

The CCJDA has been developing plans for the property since 2004, with the goal of developing a complex dedicated to unmanned aircraft systems, featuring a business park for UAS research and development, a UAS education and training center, an online data storage center, and a Cold War historical interpretive center.

"It would be good for the community, would create lot of high-paying jobs, and it's an ideal use for that kind of a building," Goodman said.

State lawmakers gave the CCJDA \$600,000 in 2011 toward that purpose.

The group was the second highest of six bidders in last year's auction, dropping out at \$500,000. Board members decided the price likely would rise significantly higher, according to Goodman.

The Safeguard Complex once housed 100 missiles meant to shoot down Soviet nuclear missiles, but Congress shut it down in 1975 following an arms treaty with the Soviet Union. An affiliated radar facility at nearby Cavalier (N.D.) Air Force Station is still in operation.

Earlier stalemate

The CCJDA once had a chance to buy the Nekoma complex along with four missile launch sites in the surrounding area for \$400,000. The federal government offered the Cavalier County group the deal, but insisted that the buyer be responsible for cleaning up about 420,000 gallons of contaminated water at the facility.

The CCJDA decided not to buy the property for fear that local taxpayers would be stuck with a hefty clean-up bill, estimated at \$4 million to \$6 million.

The federal government then put the property up for auction.

CCJDA officials didn't enter a bid until after the state Department of Health ordered the Department of Defense to clean up the site, which it has since agreed to do.

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