

The county and city governments in Weakley County are being asked to confirm financial commitments to the Weakley County Economic Development Board. The newly created board is focused on collaboration and cooperation to bring jobs to the county.

Following recent approval of an interlocal agreement, plans are to pursue a countywide industrial and commercial development program under the direction of a professional economic developer.

A job description and compensation package for the position is being reviewed by the board's personnel committee. Board members hope to have someone hired within six months.

At the board's May meeting, letters were approved formally requesting each entities' 2005-06 share to support the joint venture. Contributions are based on percentage of county population, and are to be paid quarterly.

Amounts requested include \$96,800 from the county, \$60,200 from Martin, \$16,400 from Dresden, \$12,600 from Greenfield, \$8,400 from Gleason, and \$5,600 from Sharon.

Contributions from the municipalities will be advanced by the county and repaid from the cities' shares of the last 5-cent local sales tax increase, if approved by all parties.

Also at the meeting, Andy Page, personnel committee chairman, asked for input on the job description, salary and benefits to be offered to the economic developer.

Page noted the person hired initially will help the board identify the county's strengths and weaknesses, and then develop a marketing strategy for industrial and commercial companies that are a "good fit" for Weakley County.

"We are not looking for someone strictly with a manufacturing base," said Page, indicating broad-based growth is more sustainable.

Page said that hiring a professional economic developer does not supplant board members' development efforts. "This board is going to be the lead vehicle (of economic development)."

Also, at the May meeting, Wendell Alexander, industrial property committee chairman, briefly reviewed available industrial acreage owned by each city. Subsequent discussion about a county-owned speculative building, its location and an offer to donate a building site by Dresden officials was referred to Alexander's committee.

Dresden Mayor Danny Forrester and Martin Mayor Randy Brundige told the group that their cities already had been discussing a speculative building before the WCED formed.

Mike Forchione, board member, said a speculative building will make the county more competitive since other counties have one or more of the buildings to use in recruitment of industrial prospects. "The need for a building is absolute," said Forchione.

There also was discussion about a survey of the area's labor skills, education and training programs to assist in upgrading skills, where necessary, and a survey of local students' career goals to aid in marketing the county.

Committee meetings followed the main meeting with the full board scheduled to meet at 7 a.m., June 21, in Room 206BC, Boling University Center, University of Tennessee at Martin.