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BUSINESS

New \$3.3M facility planned in Bath will recycle wind turbine blades and other materials

A \$3.3 million material recovery and recycling facility on Industrial Park Road in Bath will bring 12 new jobs paying close to \$60,000 to the area.

Chris Potter The Evening Tribune

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The final destination for retiring massive wind turbine blades across the state, and perhaps the nation, may soon be located in Steuben County.

Momentum of Western New York is launching a \$3.3 million material recovery and recycling facility on Industrial Park Road in Bath that will bring a dozen new jobs, paying close to \$60,000, to the area.

Momentum will specialize in windmill blade recycling, and the new company is exploring the recycling of additional renewable energy materials such as solar panels and lithium-ion batteries. Momentum is taking over the windmill recycling operation of T&R Environmental, a sister company based on state Route 415 in Bath.

Owner Brian Polmanteer said Momentum's recycling operation will make the industry more environmentally sustainable and help reduce space shortages in landfills — a growing concern regionally and across the country.

“Even here in Steuben County we're going to hit a cap very quickly,” said Polmanteer, a Bath native. “We routinely receive phone calls from other states and local manufacturers that they have zero landfill. We could see a serious need for recycling (and) waste minimization.”

Momentum is working with the state Department of Environmental Conservation on obtaining a Part 360 permit that governs solid waste management. Permitted waste streams will include non-hazardous liquids, sludges, soils and solids, as well as non-hazardous absorbents. The facility will not be permitted to accept hazardous wastes.

“It’s essentially being brought in, processed in different variations and then shipped back out,” said Polmanteer.

“It sounds like we might be one of the first ones in the country to write policy and protocol for windmill blades.”

How Momentum project will impact local tax rolls

Construction is expected to start in October and Momentum anticipates the new facility being fully operational in the third quarter of 2023, likely by September. Three jobs at T&R Environmental are being reallocated to Momentum, which will hire for 12 new positions paying an average annual wage of \$58,750.

Momentum has an agreement under consideration with the Steuben County IDA for tax incentives to aid the project. The savings for the company total around \$319,000 in sales and mortgage tax relief and a 10-year PILOT agreement.

Real estate taxes on the site currently stand at around \$4,300. The estimated assessment in Year 1 of the PILOT is \$1 million. Under the PILOT agreement, tax revenue split between the town, county and school district would gradually increase from \$2,646 in Year 1 to \$31,622 in Year 10.

The agreement will be subject to a public hearing before the IDA votes on final approval later this month. The IDA evaluation of the project noted that Momentum will be collecting waste from across the state and the country, which will result in new revenue entering Steuben County’s economy.

“It’s exciting to work with a company that is on the cutting edge of this technology,” said IDA Executive Director Jamie Johnson. “We’re hopeful as the technology and company evolve, they’ll continue to grow in our community.”

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Momentum project fills a growing need in windmill industry

The massive size and durability of wind turbines present a challenge when the blades are decommissioned. Retired blades in the U.S. are primarily sent to one of a small number of landfills that accept them in Iowa, South Dakota or Wyoming, according to the Kleinman Center for Energy Policy at Pennsylvania University. One recent study found that the cumulative mass of decommissioned blades in the U.S. will reach 2.2 million metric tons by 2050.

Momentum hopes to alleviate some of that pressure. Its new facility in Bath will cover 28,000 square feet and house state-of-the-art technology for material recycling processes. Momentum's windmill recycling process is currently approved in New York and California.

Windmill blades are often constructed with balsa wood and fiber glass. Polmanteer explained that the blades can be cut up into manageable sizes with a diamond saw, and then fed into a shredder that effectively turns the blades into a mulch-like material.

That end-product can then be transported to the Steuben County Landfill, where it acts as an alternative daily cover. Federal regulations require all landfills to be covered at the end of each day to mitigate odors, litter, fires and other hazards.

"Instead of importing clean soil, we are importing fluff to cover garbage," said Polmanteer. "It's the most cost-effective solution."

Other companies have utilized shredded blades in the manufacturing of cement, and some have researched how to repurpose the material into new products.

Momentum is also exploring material salvage solutions for solar panels and lithium batteries, two other industries where recycling technology and capacity have lagged behind growing usage.

"The reality is there's not a lot of landfill space for this stuff," said Polmanteer.

Momentum's new facility will also take in traditional construction and demolition debris.

Scott VanEtten, who chairs the Steuben County legislature and sits on the IDA board, called Momentum's project a win-win that may lead to greater acceptance of renewable energy sources.

"It's good for the county because you're taking care of a problem with worn-out blades. Everybody that has wind farms or solar farms coming into their municipality are worried about decommissioning," said VanEtten. "Secondly, if we don't have enough (cover) material, we have to haul in actual fill to cap the garbage every day (at the landfill). It's better for the county to have a customer bringing in material every day you can use as a cap as opposed to having to buy and haul it in yourself."

Industrial Park site is 'perfect property' for Momentum project

Momentum's new home will be located on 49 undeveloped acres at the northern end of the Industrial Park. Its isolation was intentional as the facility will have to meet criteria like noise and dust control.

Polmanteer said the company has received the support of neighboring businesses on Industrial Park Road, such as Amazon and Clark Specialty. The company has also engaged residents of nearby Wildflower Hills, a manufactured home community for residents age 55 and up.

Between Momentum and the development of an Amazon warehouse, truck traffic is expected to increase exponentially on Industrial Park Road in the coming years. Polmanteer said the company is exploring the possibility of adding a pedestrian walkway to Wildflower Hills as part of the project.

"We're doing everything we can to maximize the greenspace out there on the buffer between any residential things that may develop," said Polmanteer. "It's a perfect property for our needs."

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