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## **EO Wood Centre effort legally incorporates**

By **Nelson Zandbergen**

JOHNSTOWN — After six years of academic powwows and PowerPoint presentations, dreams of a "wood innovation centre" and a forestry-related "cluster" are still brewing for the industrial park dominated today by Johnstown's GreenField Ethanol plant.

The idea took a step forward on paper last month, with the legal incorporation of "Ontario East Wood Centre & Eco-Industrial Park," an entity dedicated to the continued pursuit and promotion of such a vision for the 400-acre park owned by Edwardsburgh/Cardinal Township. (The industrial park itself has not been renamed.)

The latest initiative follows six years of groundwork through the Kemptville-based Eastern Ontario Model Forest (EOMF) group.

Tangible results remained elusive, however, as the new outfit's board of directors celebrated their inaugural meeting Dec. 10.

Sandra Lawn, spearheading the proposed wood centre as project coordinator with the EOMF group, couldn't say when the efforts might lead to actual construction inside the industrial park.

"One of the things I've learned after working 15 years in economic development is you never make these kind of predictions," she said at the debut session, which was held across the road from the industrial park, inside the spacious board room at the Port of Prescott, also owned by the township.

"Some municipalities have a lot of egg on their face for making a prediction that something was coming," said Lawn, noting simply that current leads for the site are "starting to demonstrate some very strong activity."

She added, "I live on optimism. I hope we'll put together something where you can go out there and see what it is, touch what it is.... But we're sure working hard to get it happening immediately."

Broadly speaking, the endeavour aims to add a woody component to an industrial park better known for processing corn into energy today.

The park lies "at the heart of the greatest hardwood forest in North America," noted Lawn, in a presentation that highlighted various opportunities for greater use of hardwood in new biochemical processes and energy, as well as traditional lumber and crafts. That last category included a mention of black ash basket weaving.

"Wood is unbelievable. It is a miracle. It is the creator's miracle," she emphasized.

The proposed wood innovation centre would occupy approximately 50 acres at the park, under a conceptual plan drawn up with the help of a \$130,000 federal grant awarded in 2007.

Lawn described the facility as a "thriving best practices centre of excellence for wood fibre-based and biomass enterprise that brings together technology, science and entrepreneurship ... in support of the rural economy of Ontario, sustainable forests and

sustainable communities."

Also presented were the overall objectives of the Ontario East Wood Centre & Eco-Industrial Park (OEWEC & EIP).

These included:

- developing a "forest and biomass-based and innovation-inspired cluster of industrial, business and demonstration projects in an ecologically sound environment";
- creating a "platform for scientific collaboration, business development, demonstration, piloting, commercialization, exporting and marketing of a wide array of innovative value-added wood and biomass products, including ... solid wood building components, biochemicals and bioenergy"
- assisting the forest industry with finding uses "for underutilized, lower value wood in Eastern Ontario and the region";
- and in an era of pulp-mill closures, like Domtar in Cornwall, "participation in the restructuring of the forest industry of the Great Lakes/St. Lawrence forest for the benefit of rural communities and in partnership with a variety of other organizations, academic institutions, individuals and agencies with a variety of other organizations, academic institutions, individuals and agencies with compatible goals."

EOMF vice president Tony Bull, also a member of the new corporation's board, enthusiastically described the Johnstown industrial park as "the perfect place" for the initiative. Noting the success of the township's elevator operations at the Port, he praised the local municipality for demonstrating the energy and expertise to take the wood centre project to the next level, before handing out certificates of appreciation to several individuals who served on a steering committee prior to incorporation. Among the recipients was former Edwardsburgh/Cardinal Mayor Larry Dishaw, who's been carried forward to a seat on the new board.

Meanwhile, new Mayor Bill Sloan, also inaugurated onto the board Dec. 10, later told The AgriNews that a township committee would be working on new design plans for the industrial park this year. "It's all going to be laid out with the streets and all of that. We're going to start working on it anyway," said Sloan.

The mayor also confirmed that the name "Ontario East Wood Centre & Eco-Industrial Park" is not the township's name for the park itself, and that council has made no decision to put up signs to that effect.

"The wood centre sort of put that name on it," he said.

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