

## Grant to pay for Hwy. 169 improvements, discussion needed on Le Sueur rest stop sale

By SUZANNE ROOK [srook@lesueurnews-herald.com](mailto:srook@lesueurnews-herald.com) | Posted: Sunday, July 14, 2013 1:09 pm

City, county and state leaders are expected to sit down with Cambria officials Wednesday to discuss, among other things, how to make up for a funding shortfall to improve a segment of Hwy. 169 and develop a new rest stop along the roadway.

The Le Sueur county administrator last week told commissioners that the road work portion of the project was funded by a nearly \$2.1 million grant to the city of Le Sueur, but dollars for the rest stop segment were not included in the award. The city and county are expected to put up about \$1.5 million for the work.

No matter the outcome, Cambria President Marty Davis said his goal is to purchase the land where the current rest stop now sits, a move that will allow his business to expand further in Le Sueur.

The rest stop, which is adjacent to the city's Cambria plant, sits on nearly 28.5 acres. The purchase was made possible by Legislative action, but needs approval from the Minnesota Department of Transportation commissioner.

Grant documents show Cambria, which manufactures engineered quartz countertops, has agreed to spend \$700,000 for the parcel. Le Sueur County records place the property's assessed value at \$439,000.

Even with that money, more than \$2.5 million is still needed to buy land and construct a replacement rest stop, according to city documents. It appears likely a MnDOT new rest area will be constructed on city property just north of Wolf Motors on Hwy. 169, though officials insist no decision has been made.

### **Priority: Land**

The road improvements, which won't likely begin until 2015, are expected to make the stretch of highway safer, particularly for motorists turning on to the highway.

Davis said the modification will have little impact on his drivers until the business park across the highway becomes reality.

"We don't need the highway to expand. Our only issue is when can we buy the land?" he said, concerned with the growing perception that Cambria is receiving grant money.

"We're not getting a penny from grants or the government," he said. "We don't want money."

Cambria will expand in Minnesota, and Davis, whose family also owns Davisco Foods and The Le Sueur Cheese Co. and The Friendly Confines Cheese Shoppe, all in Le Sueur, would like it to grow in Le Sueur.

“This region provides a very good workforce,” he said. “It’s one of the reasons we don’t want to leave.”

Without the land, Cambria is landlocked in Le Sueur. The company is now wrapping up an expansion project that last week allowed it to add a fourth manufacturing line. A fifth line is on track to open next year.

The rest stop land would allow Cambria to expand to up to 10 lines and add another 450 jobs over the next three to six years depending on the company’s growth.

*Reach Regional Managing Editor Suzanne Rook at 507-931-8567. Follow her on Twitter @rooksuzy. Reporter James Stitt contributed to the story.*