

CHS aims for 2018 relocation

By SAM WILSON Daily Inter Lake | Posted: Wednesday, June 22, 2016 7:30 am

Agriculture supplier CHS could become the inaugural tenant of the city's Glacier Rail Park by early summer 2018.

Speaking during a Kalispell Chamber of Commerce lunch presentation on Tuesday, the company's local general manager, Mark Lalum, said the expanded facility has long been a goal, noting he has "a complete set of blueprints from the 1990s."

"It makes business sense to us, it's an advantage to our producers and our facilities are old," Lalum said. "For us in our world, it's really a golden opportunity for us."

The company is still finalizing its agreement with the Flathead Economic Development Authority to become the first of four businesses expected to occupy the Glacier Rail Park, the planned economic development area to be funded by a \$10 million federal grant awarded to the city last year.

City Planning and Building Director Tom Jentz said the CHS move is a critical part of the rail park plan, and added that the new location for the ag-supply business also will help ease traffic congestion from the 550 to 600 rail cars and 2,500 to 3,000 trucks that annually arrive at the facility's current location on Center Street.

"Our project is dependent on them moving there," Jentz said after the presentations. "They really shouldn't be downtown. When they built that in 1909, it was on the edge of town."

Lalum said after the presentation that once CHS finalizes its plans in the next two months, it will be ready to put the construction project out for bids as soon as the economic development authority completes an environmental assessment on the rail park.

Construction is scheduled to begin by July 2017 and take six to eight months.

Lalum noted that CHS has agreed to keep the costs of the expanded facility at or below \$13 million.

He said the new grain elevator will have an increased capacity of slightly over 500,000 bushels, up from the current structure's 350,000-bushel capacity.

The new location will also expand the capacity of the fertilizer plant from 2,500 tons to 4,000 tons to meet regional demand.

The company will sell its three existing facilities — its Idaho Street store, the Center Street grain elevator and an agronomy facility on Fourth Avenue East North — to the Flathead County Economic Development Authority for redevelopment after the move.

If all goes according to plan, Lalum said the company could move into its new space by June or July 2018.

Reporter Sam Wilson can be reached at 758-4407 or by email at swilson@dailyinterlake.com.