

STATE OF NEW MEXICO
County of Luna

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Media Release

Years of cooperation between multiple state and local agencies may lead to ground breaking on a project that could push Luna County into the forefront of advances in various technologies.

The story of Luna County being selected as the site for the potential Center for Innovation, Testing and Evaluation is not short or simple. After pulling consideration for the project out of Hobbs, NM in 2012, mainly due to land issues, the former Luna County manager, Kelly Kuentler, decided to approach Pegasus Global Holdings, the project developer. Luna County had originally missed out on the first request for proposals put out by the developer, but saw opportunity when the project failed to take root in Eastern New Mexico.

In July 2012, the county wrote Pegasus indicating the county’s interest in being considered for the project, which could cost upwards of \$1 billion. That letter began a push by Luna County to aggressively court the project for its potential economic impact on the county and region. Shortly after the county began pursuing the project, a local stakeholder group was formed with county employees and volunteers from the Office of the State Engineer, State Land Office, New Mexico Department of Transportation and local utilities to help make the pitch for the CITE.

“We used local people to get it done,” Charles “Tink” Jackson, current Luna County manager, said. As a district state engineer at the time, he was a member of the stakeholder group formed by the county before he was hired as manager in 2014. “We didn’t use a lot of taxpayer funds to get it; we used the resources we had. That’s what makes Luna County Luna County.”

He credits the progress the county has made toward securing the project to that group and the former county administration, saying that other communities in the state had hired consultants and used “a lot” of taxpayer funds to pursue the project.

Before he was hired, county staff and the stakeholders group had already submitted land use proposals to Pegasus, as well as secured agreements between state agencies and local governments to ensure the groundwork had been laid to make Luna County as attractive of an option as possible for Pegasus. He also thanked Dona Ana County government for their cooperation with the project. The road leading into the project site, which is located about 40 miles east of Deming, is a joint Dona Ana-Luna County road. Additionally, a portion of the buffer zone around the planned “ghost city” falls in Dona Ana County.

“I inherited a solid foundation as a new county manager due to the hard work of that group in planning and preparing for such a massive project,” he said. “Thanks to their preparation, Pegasus just announced that they plan to hopefully break ground on the project before the end of the year. Their plans and schedule may change, but this project has made more progress in Luna County than anywhere else.”

The developer projects approximately 350 economic base jobs — that is, jobs funded by money flowing from outside the community — and about 3,500 supporting jobs will be created once the CITE is operational. After it is built, the CITE would act as a ghost town mimicking urban, suburban and rural sections of a town designed for a population of 35,000 to be used for testing and evaluating new technologies.

“This state-of-the-art project could attract more economic development opportunities for our county and region than anything else in recent memory,” Current Board of Commissioners Chairman Joe “Oleo” Milo, Jr., said. He was a commissioner when the county began pursuing the project. “All we stand to lose is a relatively small amount of time spent attracting the project, but the potential gains for the community seem nearly endless.”

If the project goes through, it could be operational in about three-and-a-half years. Luna County plans to continue working closely with the developer to offer assistance where possible.

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