

Federal land may be sold

Porter site was Air Force facility

By RAE TYSON
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The federal government may sell a 549-acre U.S. Air Force testing facility on Balmer Road in the Town of Porter. Federal sources said the property would be placed on the market within a month.

Both the town and SCA Chemical Services Inc. have expressed an interest in the complex, which is on the north side of Balmer Road, west of Porter Center Road.

"As far as SCA is concerned, we are looking at, along with a lot of others," company spokesman Kathryn Myers said yesterday.

SCA owns a hazardous waste facility on the opposite side of Balmer Road. Acquisition of the government property would boost the company's local holdings to more than 1,300 acres.

Town Supervisor Ronald Johnston said the town hoped to obtain the land for an industrial park, a move he said would encourage economic growth.

"It would be an ideal industrial park for the town," Johnston said, vowing to contact the federal General Services Administration about the pending sale.

GSA officials, still uncertain about the value of the site, said yesterday the Air Force has no further use for the testing center, which is operated by Bell Aerospace Textron of Wheatfield.

Bell has operated the test site for more than 20 years, experimenting primarily with rocket fuels, including propellants used in the Gemini and Apollo space programs.

Company officials, saying they were still under government contract, declined to discuss activities at the facility, saying only that it involved "government defense work."

Johnston said demolition crews have been removing equipment from the complex for the past month.

A company spokesman said employment reached a peak of 400 workers in the 1960s, then gradually declined to "only a handful" in recent years.

According to GSA policy, the town may get first crack at the land.

A GSA spokesman in Boston said all surplus government property is initially offered to local, state and federal agencies.

"Public sale is the last step in the process," Patrick Vaccaro said.

The Air Force property was part of a 1,500 acre munitions plant — the Lake Ontario Ordnance Works — built during World War II.

Much of the original ordnance plant property already has been sold to private interests, including SCA. About 190 acres in the Town of Lewiston remains under government control and has been used to store radioactive wastes since 1944.

And the U.S. Army still owns an estimated 350 acres east of the Air Force testing center.