

FedEx plans round-the-clock construction once it breaks ground on megahub

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FedEx Ground, which has seen its plans for a megahub in Allen Township waylaid by wranglings over road maintenance and deed restrictions, plans to have crews working around the clock once it breaks ground in June.

The 24-month construction timetable will begin with a six-month period of extended hours that would involve two 10-hour shifts per day on the 260-acre parcel off Willowbrook Road, according to Timothy Scherling, project engineering manager for FedEx Ground.

During the initial six months, work will begin at 6 a.m. and run to 4 p.m. with two hours of downtime to bring in a second crew and refuel equipment. The second shift would run 6 p.m. to 4 a.m. with two hours of downtime from 4-6 a.m. The schedule would be followed six days a week, Scherling said.

Scherling outlined the timetable on Tuesday at a township supervisors meeting. He initially requested the township approve hours of 6 a.m. to 8 p.m. for the length of construction, but later added a request for an accelerated schedule from June through November as a way to ramp-up operations.

"In order to ensure that the project doesn't get behind the eight ball," he said.

That will allow for earth-moving to clear the way for the 1.2-million-square-foot regional hub, developed by the Rockefeller Group on land purchased from the Lehigh-Northampton Airport Authority.

"After six months we should be erecting steel," said Scherling.

FedEx doesn't have a specific June start date for construction, but hopes to be finished by mid-2018. The company initially had envisioned opening this year when it first pitched the idea in 2012 for a \$335 million facility that would process as many as 15,000 packages an hour.

But it lost ground after going through the township review process only to find out that neighboring Hanover Township in Lehigh County objected to having to maintain a 3,300-foot section of Willowbrook Road within its borders that FedEx trucks would have use. That matter was resolved with the state taking over the stretch.

But then FedEx learned that the airport site contained a deed restriction precluding industrial uses. Rockefeller expects that restriction to be removed soon, paving the way for the official sale of the site to Rockefeller for \$9.9 million.

At Tuesday's meeting, Scherling said the work area will primarily be lit by earth-moving equipment but will include "several light towers."

Noise from work will be kept within what is allowable by township ordinance, Scherling said.

Supervisors agreed to the schedule with little discussion.

Township Solicitor B. Lincoln Treadwell said that Allen has no ordinance restriction on construction hours, but usually requests that work take place between 7 a.m. and 7 p.m.

Earlier this week, the airport authority agreed to sell an additional 233 acres over three parcels to the New York-based developer which could eventually bring another two warehouses of 1 million square feet each to the area.

The new deal includes 21 acres just north of the FedEx site and 57 acres west of it in Allen Township, along with a 155-acre tract along Willowbrook Road east of FedEx in East Allen Township.

A traffic study conducted in 2012 by the Rockefeller Group estimated an additional 12,000 cars and 1,800 trucks per day on local roads once FedEx and two other projects were in operation.