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Railway picks project partner

By Mark Fagan, Journal-World, Lawrence, Kan.

Oct. 17--Burlington Northern Santa Fe's new 1,000-acre logistics park will be developed by a San Diego company with a little bit of experience.

Try a 6,000-acre complex near Dallas.

The Allen Group emerged Monday as the winner in a competition to develop and provide master-planning services for BNSF Railway Co.'s planned new logistics park near Gardner, a community southeast of Lawrence just across the Johnson County line.

The Gardner project will be expected to draw contractors from Lawrence, plus other workers in future years as the park fills out with an estimated 12 million square feet of warehouse space.

The project will be on top of a 6,000-acre project The Allen Group already has going south of Dallas, to make room for 60 million square feet of warehouses spanning four communities.

Driving demand: trade with Pacific Rim countries, whose products are shipped into the Ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach, then taken by rail to hubs for transfer onto trucks and delivery to stores throughout the Midwest, South and East Coast.

The project should help "put the Kansas City region on the international map," said Vann Cunningham, the railway's assistant vice president for economic development.

The Gardner center would be on BNSF's main line that connects Southern California to Chicago, where the railroad already has a 2,500-acre logistics complex.

"We are confident that the Kansas City logistics hub will be recognized as the heart of the coast-to-coast rail corridor," said Edward Romanov, president and chief operating officer for The Allen Group.

Fred Sherman, a former Lawrence city planner who now works as community development director of Gardner, said that The Allen Group's experience working in California -- it has two intermodal parks in the state, including one with a 1.7 million-square-foot warehouse for Target Corp. -- could come in handy.

"They will bring a level of expertise in terms of community involvement and community referendum votes that maybe some area developer groups are not used to," he said.

Gardner voters will decide Nov. 7 whether the city should annex 1,000 acres planned for the railway project. The company plans to proceed with its Kansas plans no matter what happens during the election, said Matt Rose, BNSF's chairman and chief executive officer, during a visit to Kansas University last month.

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