

February 12, 2009

Kaufman & Robinson Inc. looks to expand along College Avenue

BY PAT FERRIER

patferrier@coloradoan.com

Fort Collins is starting to see a return on its \$10 million investment in the Dry Creek Floodplain on North College Avenue as more businesses look to develop there.

By reducing the size of the floodplain from 1,400 acres to 300 acres in the three-year project, the city cleared the way for new development along the corridor and did away with the need for some businesses to carry flood insurance.

Now, new retail, commercial and housing projects are in the works - the first piece of a major reconstruction effort along the corridor that residents and neighbors have said suffered from years of neglect.

Ion blaster manufacturer Kaufman & Robinson Inc. plans to further its investment along the North College Avenue corridor with a new building and a little help from the city.

Kaufman & Robinson, now in leased space at 1306 Blue Spruce Drive, wants to stay in the neighborhood but expand to a new \$1.3 million, 10,000-square-foot building just north of the Food Bank of Larimer County on the east side of the road.

The company plans to ask the North College Urban Renewal Authority for up to \$300,000 in tax increment financing funds to help the company recycle about 500,000 gallons of water used to cool its vacuum systems, said General Manager Jim Kahn. Tax increment financing is a development tool businesses in Urban Renewal Authorities can use for public improvements.

"They want to make north Fort Collins look prettier, so they'll help with extra landscaping and outside improvements," Kahn said.

The citizen's advisory group to the North College Urban Renewal Authority threw its support to the proposal last week, suggesting Kaufman request \$300,000 in TIF money, \$85,000 more than it initially wanted, said Ron Lautzenheiser, a business owner and member of the advisory group.

The Urban Renewal Authority board, which essentially is the Fort Collins City Council, will also have to approve the financing package.

Previously, the land would have fallen within the Dry Creek Floodplain and been nearly impossible to develop, Lautzenheiser said.

The 27-year-old Fort Collins company has added five employees in the last year to bring its work force to 13 and seen revenue grow about 20 percent, Kahn said. "We hope it keeps up."

Ion sources are used in space to keep satellites in one place, preventing them from rolling out of position, and for ground-based applications such as eyeglasses, Kahn said.

Coatings on eyeglasses can bead up, much like water on the lid of a pot, Kahn said. The ion beams can help smooth those voids.

Much of the company's growth has been in ground applications, Kahn said.