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HARRISONBURG, VIRGINIA
Thursday, December 15th 2011

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 **43°F**
Clear

tomorrow
 High **61°F**
Low **29°F**

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County Turns To Stone

Former BC President Picked To 'Champion' Tech Center Project

Posted: December 15, 2011
By JEREMY HUNT

HARRISONBURG — Rockingham County officials have tapped Phillip Stone to serve as economic adviser for the technology park north of Harrisonburg.

The Board of Supervisors appointed Stone, an attorney and former president of Bridgewater College, to the unpaid post on Wednesday.

His appointment fulfills one recommendation made by consultants who are developing a master plan for the Rockingham Center for Research and Technology on U.S. 11.

The Timmons Group, a Richmond-based consulting firm, suggested a business leader with strong connections and a good reputation be identified as a "community champion" for the park to help spur growth and encourage companies to invest in the area.

County officials noted, among other accomplishments, Stone's tenure at Bridgewater College. He was president of the private liberal arts school from 1994 until 2010 and now runs a Harrisonburg law firm, The Stone Group, with his children.

"I think you could search from corner to corner in this county and not find anyone better for it," said District 5 Supervisor Mike Breeden, chairman of the board.

Stone said he was flattered by the appointment.

"I'll do anything I can to make [the technology park] successful," he said.

At Wednesday's board meeting, representatives of Timmons and ObrienAtkins Associates, another consulting group, outlined the master plan for the park, known as CADRE, and gave recommendations for the board to consider.

"We didn't want a plan that would sit on a shelf," Timmons principal Tim Davey said.

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As presented Wednesday, the center would be developed in four phases, the first of which opened about two years ago when SRI Shenandoah Valley moved into its building on Research Drive west of U.S. 11. The plan features several buildings connected by a network of roads and walking trails.

"It's easy to look at this and say, 'Wow, how do we get there?'" said Jay Smith, principal and director of landscaping for ObrienAtkins, of Raleigh, N.C. "I imagine it's like eating an elephant. You do it a little at a time."

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To bring the vision for the park to fruition, Timmons recommends the county invest in infrastructure and other site work to make it as easy as possible for companies to move in.

Rockingham should also hire a full-time employee with an office at the center, and develop a letter of understanding among the city, county, SRI and area higher-education institutions, according to Timmons.

Per county staff recommendation, supervisors decided to forward the financial elements of the master plan to the Finance Committee for review.

The board also directed staff to continue working with the city and the Harrisonburg-Rockingham Chamber of Commerce to develop a branding and marketing strategy for the community, which would be used on materials for potential investors.

District 4 Supervisor Bill Kyger, commenting on the significance of the project, said the center and Rockingham Memorial Hospital's move last year to a new facility off Port Republic Road will have a lasting impact on future generations.

"I've been on the board for 24 years, and I don't think I've seen anything ... more important than the new hospital and this project," he said. "We have the opportunity upon us to leave this place better than when we came to it."

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