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[00:00:00] **Speaker 1** Zach I'm rolling everybody. All right. Well, give us an update on where we are with the CHS crush plant because, you know, Evansville has been the potential location for one of these facilities for since 2000, early 2000s really, right?

[00:00:14] **Speaker 2** Yeah, so there was an initial soy processing plant proposal probably more than a decade or so ago that did not happen the last last recession 2008-2009. The current plant that's looking to locate here, started talking to us a couple years ago and they worked out a contract with us. So they've been reimbursing us for some of our costs that we encourage to do engineering analysis, stuff like that. So that's been ongoing and in that contract there's some kind of key dates that have been set up. And one of the first ones coming up is summer of next year to start that construction process. So they are, we're kind of all marching towards that date. They did recently get their air permit, so they have that in hand right now and they've been updating our council quarterly on their progress on things.

[00:01:01] **Speaker 1** So as far as you know, is it more of a federal thing that they're waiting to say yes?

[00:01:07] **Speaker 2** Yeah, that's a great question. We have those dates in our contract and they're just obligated to kind of tell us when they've got to that next mile post. They have their own internal review process that they're doing to evaluate the project, you know, from year to year timing or whatever. We're not privy to all their internal metrics right, but you know there's probably a lot of factors that they are trying to weigh right now.

[00:01:33] **Speaker 1** So what would it mean to have this facility here? Because there's a connection with Evansville and soybeans, right? Yeah.

[00:01:38] **Speaker 2** Yeah, yeah, yeah. We are somehow named the Soybean Capital of Wisconsin. We have a sign up as you come in the town from the south. And you know, we, there's a lot of soy grown in this region, southern Wisconsin, northern Illinois. There's a lot of soybeans farms that are out there planting beans. So there's, and those folks have nowhere to go with their beans. They need to go elsewhere out of state, migrate away from the Rock County area, Evansville area. And you know, so this, this plant would give them a place to take their beans, right? Some place local, not a two hour drive, but a closer drive. And the investment in Evansville is of course huge. One of the biggest commercial industrial projects that we've ever had. So we've got an $800 million construction budget to get the plant built. There's about a 25 acre out lot that's on the property as well that could be used for other development, commercial restaurants, things, something like that. It has drawn a lot of interest to the city. So other surrounding development ideas have kind of come to our doorstep inquiring about what would go good with a CHS or a soy type facility. So it would mean a lot to us learning though, from the past and our first soy plant looked at a decade or so ago. We've been very careful as we've gone along in the process to make sure that there's no city funds outlaid that would be coming out of the taxpayer's pocket. Making sure that the review process is done with consultants and CHS's reimbursement. And then they have asked for some, some tip incentives when they build. And again, those tips would be given out on an annual basis, making sure we don't get ahead of ourselves financially.

[00:03:27] **Speaker 1** I'm sure you're aware of the international crisis over American soybeans with China, saying they're not going to buy them anymore. Right now, their farmers are harvesting and bring them to the bin and they don't know if any of them are going to be sold or whether they're going to lose money on all of them. How much of this is kind of holding your breath is like the potential answer to a lot of these. You know, it won't be there.

[00:03:50] **Speaker 2** Yeah, you know, I am not a soy farmer, right? I'm not a soy processor. So I don't know, you know, how all those things affect their line of business. I guess what I can say is probably since COVID, we've had a number of businesses that have been either looking at building or building here. And I think kind of post COVID, post some of the economy questions, you know, a few years ago have made a lot of businesses kind of, you know, take a different route or reevaluate. So what factors are leading into their particular timeline for development? I don't know.

[00:04:24] **Speaker 1** But is this kind of a, I mean, you talk about the significance for Evansville, it's kind of a hold your breath moment to like, to wait and see what happens. Well,

[00:04:30] **Speaker 2** Well, you know, I guess a little bit, I will say, as we entered this process, we were very careful that we wouldn't be in a position where we have to hold our breath for it to come here, right? It would be incredible if it came here, it'd be a great addition to the city. It would do a lot for the city economically from a tax base and other, you know, ancillary industries that might come, that might come and locate around it, all tremendous things. But we've carefully paced the project in our participation, so if it doesn't happen, we're not any worse off than we're, you know, that day before. I can give some examples of that. The land that they have purchased used to be under four or five different landowners. Since before I came on staff for the city, there's been a lot of attempt to get the land assembled under one landowner without any success, and this project made that happen. There's been a lot talk about getting a tax increment district out there, and this project made that happen. In fact, that district got a special exemption signed by the governor about a year or so ago that makes it so that district doesn't have a negative impact on the rest of the city's taxing districts. So we've done a lot of things along the way that leave that land in a much more developable place than it was perhaps the year or month before, but leading up to, you know, the But if not, I think there'd be some disappointment. But I think we are prepared either direction this may go to make sure the city comes out of the situation financially strong.

[00:06:02] **Speaker 1** If it does happen, do you think people are prepared for the amount of trucks that will be coming in around harvest time?

[00:06:07] **Speaker 2** There was a lot of public hearing, a lot of there was a public presentation done, I want to say a year, a year and a half ago now. That was one of the primary topics in really trying to get our head around what does that look like. There was traffic study done that gave traffic numbers and amounts that really kind of helped illustrate to the public where traffic would be coming from, what it would be coming for, and then peak times, things like that. What I can say is a couple of decades ago when that initial soy plant was proposed, County M and Highway 14, that whole intersection there was actually upgraded to handle the capacity that we may see with this new plant. So the intersection is ready to take the traffic. It's just a matter of, I think, adjusting to no longer a quick green light there, maybe a couple more seconds that we have to wait to make a left or right turn.

[00:06:58] **Speaker 1** Obviously the title of Soybean Capital came before this facility, but could this just cement that in there?

[00:07:04] **Speaker 2** I think it would. It arguably would definitely cement that title, yeah.

[00:07:08] **Speaker 1** All right, anything else that you want to add along these lines?

[00:07:10] **Speaker 2** No, just, again, city's excited about this. We've gone into this, making sure that we are financially looking towards the future and not the past on it. And then also, we've worked with a lot of partners that have located businesses here, done things here. And CHS has just been very, very great. They come every quarter to communicate to council the current status of the project, where things are. And they've had monthly calls with staff kind of going over some things. So it's been really great to have somebody who can pick up that phone, answer our questions, and as we kind of wait and see what happens next, so.

[00:07:49] **Speaker 1** Can I get you to say and spell your name and give your title?

[00:07:52] **Speaker 2** Jason Sargent, J-A-S-O-N S-E-R-G-E A-N-T. And my title is city administrator.

[00:07:59] **Speaker 1** All right, that's all we need from you. All right. Thank you very much. Before I cut, I just wanna get 15 seconds of room time. Okay, so we're just gonna be quiet and let the camera record the ambience.