

City approves CenterPoint

July 29, 2008 By [BOB OKON](#) bokon@scn1.com

JOLIET -- CenterPoint's plan for a massive intermodal facility in Joliet is a go. The city council voted 8-0 Tuesday night to give the company the annexation and zoning it needs to develop more than 3,300 acres into a rail yard, intermodal center and industrial park.

Councilman Tim Brophy abstained from voting, citing a conflict of interest. One of the people affected by the development is looking to buy a home marketed by Brophy's real estate company. The developer has forecast that the project will be a \$2 billion investment generating up to 7,400 full-time jobs and creating 17 million square feet of industrial space. CenterPoint hasn't set a timetable for building, but plans to start as soon as possible. Much of the debate about the project in recent months has centered on the project's impact on nearby residents and local roads. But CenterPoint has enjoyed the backing of business and labor leaders who point to the employment and economic potential of the project. The Joliet operation will be larger than the CenterPoint Intermodal Center the Oak Brook-based company developed in Elwood. CenterPoint North will sprawl through an area running roughly south of Laraway Road to Millsdale Road and west of Illinois 53 past Brandon Road. CenterPoint also would employ thousands of construction workers -- the company has estimated as many as 6,000 construction jobs -- and the project has had strong backing from building trades unions. The city council on Tuesday approved annexation and special intermodal industrial zoning for the CenterPoint property. Tax numbers A study paid for by the company predicted that CenterPoint will generate \$305 million in new tax revenue in its first 21 years and a total of \$550 million after 31 years. Potential tax dollars had previously been a main concern among Joliet officials, who resisted the project for months after it was first proposed in spring 2007. Eventually, however, Joliet assured that CenterPoint would not get tax increment financing incentives, which were put in place for CenterPoint projects in Elwood and Crete. TIF districts freeze property tax dollars. Without the TIF, local taxing districts immediately begin to see property tax gains from the development. Truck traffic City officials and CenterPoint representatives also crafted a plan designed to send truck traffic out of the intermodal yard to Arsenal Road and Interstate 55. The plan is designed to avoid overloading Illinois 53 with trucks, but many local officials also are worried about the impact on I-55. The Arsenal Road interchange is due for improvements to accommodate the truck traffic already created by CenterPoint's facility in Elwood. City Manager Tom Thanas said Tuesday night that an IDOT letter indicated bid letting for the improvements would happen next summer and construction would begin soon after. The plan also turns some public roads on the CenterPoint property into private roads. Under the plan, Brandon Road no longer will connect Elwood with Joliet, since part of it will be cut off. An alternate route will be offered on Patterson Road. Rural life gone? The project also will disrupt the rural-industrial balance that has existed in the area for decades. The city council urged CenterPoint to make offers to buy property from people living next to the future facility. While CenterPoint said it made offers based on fair appraisals with a 25 percent premium added, many of those residents have said they would not be able to replicate their lifestyle elsewhere with the money offered by CenterPoint. www.heraldnewsonline.com