



Gemmy approval could lead to greener pastures

By Chris Roark, Staff Writer

(Created: Tuesday, February 5, 2008 6:36 PM CST)

Should the town council give the green light to bring in Gemmy Industries at the Feb. 18 meeting, Flower Mound will take steps toward becoming green itself.

And, Flower Mound officials say that's a step in the right direction.

Developers with Gemmy, an international company that makes decoration items such as outdoor Christmas blow-ups and Halloween accessories, helped win support from Flower Mound's Planning and Zoning Commission on Monday by touting its plan to build its warehouse as an environmentally-friendly facility. The warehouse will be located in the Lakeside Business District. Gemmy approached Flower Mound about relocating from its current Coppell location in May of 2006.

The 195,500-square foot headquarters would be the first building in Flower Mound to have such a heavy emphasis on green design, and many see the potential for others to follow suit.

"We're looking at this as a future way to build and a way to help the environment," said Jean Levenick, a Planning and Zoning commissioner who voted for approval. "Trends come and go, but we want to look to the future with this."

Craig Dickson, vice president of operations for Gemmy, said Wal-Mart — the company's biggest customer — has led the way for Gemmy to use green technology with their environmentally-friendly building in McKinney. Wal-Mart's goal is to reduce its power demands by 30 percent by 2012 and to eventually get 100 percent of its energy from renewable sources, according to the sustainability section of the company's Web site.

Following in Wal-Mart's footsteps, Dickson said Gemmy has several ways to make its building environmentally-friendly.

One technique is xeriscaping, a concept that landscapes plants that are native to the region. An example of that is buffalo grass, which can stay green using less water. The theory behind xeriscaping is that plants from its natural origin are more likely to sustain themselves than exotic plants.

"We plant those, and once they're established, the goal is to greatly reduce the need for water, mowing and fertilizing," Dickson said. "We hope that within two years, we can eliminate the water needs for the landscaping, which makes up the majority of our water usage."

In addition, Gemmy will consider using fly ash in the concrete to save energy. Fly ash is a product of burning coal, and the idea is to replace cement with it.

"By using fly ash, it saves energy," Dickson said. "It takes machines to crush the rocks to

make the aggregate that goes into making cement.”

Gemmy is also looking to take advantage of natural light. The general offices will be an open floor plan design, meaning that the majority of the office area will not have ceilings in individual offices and will be open to the roof.

There will be one skylight installed for every 1,250 square feet of office space. There will also be two stories of windows to increase the amount of light coming in to the building. Plus, a light shelf, which Dickson described as similar to an inside awning, will be used to bounce light further into the interior of the building.

“The idea is that under a perfect situation, our general offices will be completely lit by daylight,” Dickson said. “So on bright summer days, we will use virtually no power to light our offices.”

This will be achieved with day lighting control sensors which will partially turn off or completely turn off light fixtures if sufficient light is coming through the skylights and second-story windows. The general office area will be illuminated by six-lamp, T-8 fluorescent light fixtures which can have two, four or all six lamps in the fixture turned off based on the amount of natural light illuminating the office area.

Gemmy also plans to use soy-based insulation materials, which are renewable.

“A lot of energy is used to make fiberglass,” Dickson said.

He said another option for insulation is to use recycled newspapers, though a disadvantage is that if it gets wet, it’s destroyed.

Dickson also said the company is hoping to use a geothermal cooling system, which can reduce cooling costs by 40-50 percent. It works by using a heat pump to concentrate naturally existing heat from below the earth’s surface or in ground water and transferring it into the building during the winter or back under ground in the summer.

Dickson cited the Galt House East Hotel in Louisville, Ky., as an example of its effectiveness. The 750,000-square-foot building uses a 1,700-ton geothermal heat pump system and saves about \$25,000 per month in reduced energy costs, according to an article from the U.S. Department of Energy.

But, he said the cost to install it is typically more than a standard system.

In all, Dickson said Gemmy’s goal is to cut its energy costs from about \$100,000 a year to \$60,000.

“This would be a great model to show other businesses that want to come to Flower Mound,” said Melissa Glasgow, Flower Mound’s director of economic development. “We knew that developers are looking at green design, and we’ve taken the first step to encourage the development of that kind of building.”