

Battle Creek approves wage waiver for Rosler

Barrett Newkirk • *The Enquirer* • August 18, 2010

Rosler Metal Finishing will not be required to pay prevailing wages for its planned Battle Creek expansion.

City commissioners voted Tuesday to grant Rosler a waiver of the wage requirement for its \$6 million expansion in the Fort Custer Industrial Park, where it currently manufactures surface-finishing equipment.

With one vacant seat on the commission, the vote was 6-2 in favor of the waiver, with Commissioners Lynn Ward Gray and Laurie Sullivan voting against the measure.

Commissioners who voted for the waiver said it was important to help a local company wanting to grow.

"Supporting this request is supporting economic development, supporting local jobs," Commissioner Diane Thompson said.

Mayor Susan Baldwin said that in Muskegon, the city is offering companies free land and reduced water service if they promise to create a certain number of jobs.

"This is the kind of competition that we're experiencing out there," she said.

Sullivan and Gray said they didn't want to see the city back off on its own standards.

"Certainly, prevailing wage was put there for a reason, and I feel we should honor that," Gray said.

Paying prevailing wages would have added \$866,796 to the cost of the project, Rosler officials said.

Rosler also has operations in Adrian and threatened to move all of its workers there if it did not receive a break on the wages for construction workers. Rosler is expected to seek a city tax abatement and would therefore normally be required to pay prevailing

wages.

Some people pointed out Tuesday that the commission last granted a prevailing wage waiver to United Solar Ovonic, which has since backed off of its plans.

Rosler says it plans to bring 34 workers to Battle Creek with an annual payroll of \$1.6 million.

If the company doesn't come close to hitting those goals within a year, it will have to pay the Battle Creek Tax Increment Finance Authority the money it would have had to pay for prevailing wages.

An attorney for Rosler told commissioners that while the higher wages might bring a short-term benefit, the company's expansion will offer the city greater long-term benefits.

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In other business

Also Tuesday, the Battle Creek City Commission:

- Accepted a bid from Buist Electric Inc., a Byron Center-based firm, to install decorative lighting on downtown bridges for \$186,894. The vote was postponed twice over concerns over the bid process. A motion by Commissioner Lynn Ward Gray to rebid the project failed.
- Voted to change to the city ordinance limiting the size of accessory buildings on residential lots.
- Agreed to give a tax break to Musashi Auto Parts,

which is upgrading its facilities and plans to add four jobs.

- Approved a payment of \$125,000 to Neighborhoods Inc. for neighborhood stabilization services.