

Franklin ready to host biotech companies

By Joyce Kelly/Daily News staff

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FRANKLIN — Franklin leaders' efforts to bring biotech companies to town, most recently by designating biotech zones and priority development sites, have been recognized by two advocacy groups.

The Massachusetts Biotechnology Council and Massachusetts Alliance for Economic Development awarded Franklin a bronze "BioReady Community" rating, said Bryan Taberner, director of Franklin Planning and Community Development.

"It's just one more thing to let folks know Franklin is ready, willing and able to invite industrial development here," said Town Administrator Jeffrey D. Nutting.

The ratings are intended to help advance the biotechnology industry in Massachusetts, and promote cities and towns that have demonstrated a commitment to do so, according to the council's Web site, www.massbio.org.

The bronze ranking means a community features municipal water and sewer in commercial and industrial areas, zoning that allows for biotech laboratory and manufacturing uses by special permit, and has identified a local point of contact to assist biotech projects.

"It means we accept biotechnology in the community. We're trying to attract biotech in the community, because any such company will increase the assessed value of property, which means more tax revenue and jobs for the town," said Taberner.

Franklin's ideal company, according to Nutting: "One that pays people very well and is clean."

"In this economy, we're not fussing. If someone wants to come in and put up a warehouse, we'll welcome them. It helps the company, it helps the residents who work there, it helps the tax base - it's a win-win-win," said Nutting.

Taberner is interested in attracting new, alternative energy companies, he said.

"Any new initiatives out there, we're very much interested. Right now, alternative energy is a big thing," Taberner said.

And biotechnology companies in general tend to offer well-paying jobs, which is good for the region, and they take the time to train people, Taberner said.

Franklin has space at industrially zoned Forge Park, Franklin Industrial Park, and by year's end, when Putnam Investments vacates Financial Park, 431 Washington St., Franklin will have a finished, 238,281-square-foot building available, he said.

Massachusetts has 44 bio-ready communities, according to the council's Web site.

Other towns in the bronze level, in addition to Franklin, include Burlington, Easthampton, Everett, Gardner, Greenfield, Holliston, Lawrence, Northbridge, Randolph, Salem, Sturbridge, and West Bridgewater.

Locally, only Framingham has been dubbed more "bio-ready," with a platinum status, the council's highest rating.

In a letter to the town, the council's president, Robert Coughlin, said that "speed to the laboratory bench and the manufacturing line is critical" to the biotechnology industry.

Taberner said he is optimistic Franklin's streamlined permitting process and the creation of priority development sites will help attract biotech companies.

From here, Taberner said he aims to bump up Franklin's bio-ready ranking. The Mass Biotechnology Council lists the main requirements for towns to meet the gold status, for instance, as a town having sites or buildings pre-permitted for biotechnology use, or having existing buildings in which biotech laboratory or manufacturing activities are taking place.

A town could go even further by have buildings with more than 20,000 square feet of space available for biotech uses in a pre-permitted building, according to the council's Web site.

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