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## Growing data storage firm eyes Duluth for expansion

Involta, an Iowa-based data storage company ranked 40th on the 2010 Fortune 500 list of fastest-growing private companies, is eyeing Duluth's Technology Park for expansion.

By: [Candace Renalls](#), Duluth News Tribune

Involta, an Iowa-based data storage company ranked 40th on the 2010 Fortune 500 list of fastest-growing private companies, is eyeing Duluth's Technology Park for expansion.

Local economic development experts say it would be a plum for Duluth, making the city more attractive to businesses.

"What data centers do is create an incredibly valuable infrastructure that draws other businesses that need data centers," said Rob West, CEO of Area Partnership for Economic Expansion, which worked with Involta. "And it also positions us as a player."

Involta's proposal to build a highly secure data center in Duluth is among 11 proposals to be considered today by the Duluth Economic Development Authority, the agency authorized to spend tax dollars on development projects. While Involta has considered several sites in Duluth, the Duluth Technology Park at Rice Lake and Arrowhead roads appears foremost.

"It's a great site, one the community has marketed as a very suitable site for that kind of activity," said Brian Hanson, DEDA's executive director.

A data storage center isn't expected to create a lot of jobs in Duluth beyond those needed for its heavy-duty construction designed to withstand high winds, explosions and other disasters. In Akron, Ohio, where Involta is building a similar \$20 million data center, 60 permanent jobs will be created when it's up and running, said Rick Rebadow of the Greater Akron Chamber of Commerce.

"They're a great company," Rebadow said of Involta. "They're a very progressive company. They have great leadership. They're young, and they're very savvy."

DEDA commissioners will decide which of the 11 proposals to pursue with development agreements. Using existing money from tax-increment financing to encourage construction, the agreements could include grants, forgivable or unforgiveable loans and equity investments, Hanson said.

But there's a catch: Construction must begin by June 30, Hanson said.

Rory Mesecher, who guides Involta's expansion efforts, said the company is considering other cities in other states as well "because you never know when there will be a roadblock."

"The decision will be made very soon on what we're going to do," he said Tuesday. "Right now, the official word is, we don't know."

In Akron, the highly secure, around-the-clock data center Involta is building will be a big plus for the city, says Rebadow.

"It's a good project to have, and it can mean a lot of companies looking to come into the area," he said. "Security is an added attraction."

Like Duluth, Akron doesn't currently have such a data center.

Hanson likened it to what having a railroad coming through a town meant to a community years ago.

"It's an important part of the infrastructure in a community," he said. "Technology is more and more important. Data is everything today."

Of the 11 companies submitting proposals to DEDA, Involta is one of only two that would be new to Duluth. While Involta has done business in the Duluth area, according to Hanson, it doesn't have a physical presence here yet.

"They're looking for one," he said.

In August, Involta joined the Greater Duluth Chamber of Commerce. Joining the local chamber is a common move when Involta begins to establish a presence in a community, Mesecher said.

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