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## **Beverage firm plans big expansion**

LOHR McKINSTRY Press-Republican

ELIZABETHTOWN — Essex County lawmakers gave tentative approval Monday to a tax break for a \$2 million expansion that will add nine jobs at High Peaks Distributing in St. Armand.

Construction of a 13,000-square-foot warehouse at the beverage distributor will also triple the assessment from \$404,000 to a projected \$1.4 million.

Essex County Industrial Development Agency Co-Director Jody Olcott told the County Board of Supervisors Economic Development Committee that the St. Armand Town Council and the Saranac Lake Central School Board have given their OK for the payment in lieu of taxes, commonly called a PILOT, for High Peaks Distributing.

The Economic Development Committee voted unanimously to approve the PILOT. Approval by the Board of Supervisors has a second vote at Ways and Means on June 30 and a final vote July 7 at the board's regular session.

### **FAMILY OWNED**

The business currently has a 19,000-square-foot facility at 1016 State Route 3, and the construction project will increase that to 32,000 square feet.

“It's a great project,” Olcott told the Press-Republican after the meeting. “We're happy to support them. They're a family-run business.”

High Peaks Distributing is operated by Thomas McCraith, who serves as president, and his sister, Susan McCraith, vice president, and other family members.

They also have an operation in the Utica area, McCraith Beverages, which opened in 1971. High Peaks Distributing began in 2011.

Without sufficient storage space at the St. Armand facility, they've been forced to truck large quantities of beverages up from Utica to keep it stocked, Olcott said, and the expansion will save on transportation costs.

Construction is expected to begin in mid July and will include a new septic system and inside loading docks.

### **APA APPROVAL**

High Peaks Distributing has 19 employees, with an annual payroll of \$930,000. The nine new jobs will have an additional payroll of \$230,000 a year.

The project got Adirondack Park Agency approval in May, which was required because it's a more-than-25-percent expansion of a commercial-use structure within a quarter mile of the Saranac River, a state-designated recreational waterway.

Olcott said the firm came to the IDA with three propositions: They could move to Clinton County, stay as they are or expand the St. Armand plant.

“We wanted them to stay here, so we developed this proposal.”

The IDA also used its authority to grant High Peaks Distributing a sales-tax exemption for the construction project that amounts to about \$75,000.

### **FULL TAX AFTER 10 YEARS**

The PILOT means the company will get a 50 percent property-tax exemption the first year, 45 percent the second and so on until it drops to 5 percent in the 10th year.

After that, High Peaks would pay taxes based on the full assessed value of the property.

Thomas McCraith was at the Economic Development Committee meeting on Monday, and he thanked the board for granting the PILOT.

“Thank you for wanting to come to our area,” Supervisor Roby Politi (R-North Elba) told him.

High Peaks Distributing handles beer, soft drinks, ice tea and bottled water in Essex, Clinton and Franklin counties.

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