

[https://www.knoxpages.com/news/knox-county-land-bank-takes-control-of-siemens-campus/article\\_a3fb28da-040d-11eb-aea5-67e1c0795629.html](https://www.knoxpages.com/news/knox-county-land-bank-takes-control-of-siemens-campus/article_a3fb28da-040d-11eb-aea5-67e1c0795629.html)

EDITOR'S PICK

Gottke: "This is a triumphant day in the history of Knox County manufacturing."

## **Knox County Land Bank takes control of Siemens campus**

Cheryl Splain, Correspondent

Oct 1, 2020



Members of the Knox County Land Bank board sign a resolution to assume the lease on the 47-acre former Siemens facility. The land bank will then buy the property from Cooper-Cameron. Pictured are, from left, board members Tyler Griffith, Shelley Coon, Teresa Bemiller, Brian Ball, and William Pursel.

Cheryl Splain, Correspondent

MOUNT VERNON — After decades of outside management and three years sitting vacant, the former Siemens facility is back under local control. The Knox County Land Bank takes possession today of the 47-acre property located at 105 N. Sandusky St.

Siemens Energy Inc. is leasing the property from Texas-based Cooper-Cameron Corp. Siemens agreed to transfer the lease to the land bank, which will then buy the property from Cooper-Cameron.

“This is a triumphant day in the history of Knox County manufacturing,” said Jeff Gottke, president of the land bank and the Area Development Foundation. “We have a real possibility for the first time in three years to have manufacturing activity back on this property.”

According to Gottke, the negotiation process, conducted by the ADF, started one year ago almost to the day.

“We had an offer from the former occupant to get together. We had a conversation that they were not interested in controlling this property, and was there any entity that wanted to do so,” he said. “[The process] was frustrating at times, but the answer was always yes. Local control is the only option that we have.”

“I think the opportunity for the land bank to assume this lease from Siemens shows the value of the land bank,” said Teresa Bemiller, chairwoman of the Knox County Land Bank. “It also means local control, and it shows the versatility and the sort of things thinking outside the box that we can accomplish.”

“When your business leaders live in the community where the business is, you are primed for growth,” said Mount Vernon Mayor Matt Starr. “They live here and want to invest.”

Calling the property transfer “ground zero for Mount Vernon's economic development,” Starr said that local control of the property enables the city to leverage its economic development strategy and attract new, diverse, and expanding business opportunities.

The 47-acre property will be rebranded as Cooper Progress Park.

The name 'Cooper' refers to the first occupant of the property, C&E Cooper Iron Works, established on the site in 1833.

'Progress' refers to the innovative, cutting-edge products subsequent occupants produced.

Gottke said that the name also provides a vision for the future of the campus, noting that cities must “grow and change if they want to compete in today's global economy.”



As of Oct. 1, 2020, the Knox County Land Bank has assumed control of the former Siemens facility on North Sandusky Street. The complex will be rebranded as the Cooper Progress Park. Plans call for a multi-tenant, multi-functional complex that connects the community with the property.

Cheryl Splain, Correspondent

“We want to connect this facility with the community, so not only are we going to find manufacturing entities to come here, we are going to find community services to come here,” he said.

Community services include healthcare and other social service providers. Gottke said that redevelopment not only means job creation and increased tax revenue for local governments, but it will also lead to investment in the surrounding neighborhood.

“A multi-tenant, multi-functional, urban, walkable unit, which to my knowledge doesn't exist of this size in Ohio, that is the vision for Cooper Progress Park going forward,” said Gottke.

“Thank you to Siemens, who could have done anything but decided local control was best.”

In a statement released by the land bank, Siemens Energy officials said, “Siemens cares about the communities in which it has operations. And when it becomes necessary to reduce our footprint due to changing business requirements, we look for ways to minimize the impact on the community.

“The facility in Mount Vernon has great potential to be of value to other businesses, and we are happy the Area Development Foundation and Knox County Land Bank will be able to explore all the ways in which it will benefit the community.”

The land bank will be responsible for maintaining and marketing the property, which offers 670,000 square feet across 25 buildings. It also includes buildable lots.

“Ordinarily land banks do not undertake these types of properties, but given the unique powers they have to hold property and the land bank’s community-first mission, the land bank’s involvement makes perfect sense,” said Bemiller in a statement. “Land banks are development focused. Their job is always to find the highest and best use of a property.

“We may have to hold on to some buildings for a while, but in the interest of the citizens of Knox County, we want to ensure that we identify the right use of the property.”

According to the Ohio Land Bank Association, the transaction represents the largest donation of land in land bank history. Although the Knox County Land Bank has only been **acquiring properties for two years**, Gottke did not shy away from the challenge.

“This is what land banks were designed to do,” he said of acquiring the property. “But it is going to need some help. Land banks were not designed for long-term property development.”

That help comes in the form of the newly created Cooper Park Development Corp., which will oversee operations and report to the land bank. Gottke said that hopefully no land bank money will be used to develop Cooper Progress Park.

“Property leases, sales, and grant funding should be able to cover all of our costs,” he said.

Gottke noted that the campus will not fill up overnight and that there is much work to do to market the property and get it ready for occupancy. However, he said that “a manufacturer that would be new to the community” is very interested. Knox Public Health and other entities have also expressed interest.

“I think we can attract a variety of investors,” said Doug Shull of NAI Ohio Equities who will help market Cooper Progress Park. “Our objective is to create not only value but also jobs. This is a great, great day for the city of Mount Vernon and the county.”

The land bank has already delivered notice to Cooper-Cameron of its intent to purchase the property.

“We hope that a mutually agreeable deal can be reached very quickly,” said Gottke.

## **History**

“There has been an operating industrial facility in that location since 1833. It is exciting to see that return,” Jim Gibson, director of the Knox County Historical Museum, said of the land bank acquiring possession of the property. “It is an important piece of Knox County’s industrial history.”

The C&E Cooper Iron Works began as a foundry on the site in 1833. Early in its history, the company pioneered early American iron goods; later in the 19th century, it produced steam engines and steam-powered tractors. After a merger with the Bessemer engine company in 1929, Cooper-Bessemer became the largest producer of diesel and natural gas engines in America. During World II, it produced engines for Liberty Ships, the workhorse of material transport across the ocean to the battlefields in Europe and the Pacific.

The post-war era saw a diversification in business with the acquisition of Crescent Wrench and Plumb Tools. In the mid-1960s, the headquarters of the company moved to Houston, Texas, where it remains. In 1997, Rolls-Royce Energy Systems acquired the property and the business operations, and in 2014, it was transferred to the Siemens Energy Corp. Business operations ceased on the property in 2017 after 184 years. The property which was once home to over 2,000 employees has been vacant since then.

In 2017, upon learning of the departure of Siemens from the facility, the ADF commissioned a redevelopment plan for the property. The plan called for marketing the facility not only for manufacturing but also as an urban industrial park that includes social service or healthcare facilities.

“ADF has long operated as the economic arm for all of Knox County and as such, is extremely excited to bring the Siemens campus back under local control,” said ADF Chairwoman Vickie Sant in the land bank release. “This has been a long process with work completed by many people. We believe the potential to bring more jobs and commerce to that property helps everyone doing business in the county. Stay tuned for further updates as we unlock the full potential of this property.”

---

**Cheryl Splain**