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Harris OKs two tax breaks

New Products Corp., which was mistakenly denied a request, clears first of two steps for abatement

By KATE GENELLIE - H-P Staff Writer

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BENTON HARBOR - Benton Harbor's emergency manager has approved orders that will allow for tax breaks for two area companies. Two orders, signed Dec. 16, were posted to the city's website - one that approved a tax break for AluTech and another that denied the establishing of an industrial development district for New Products Corp. - but Emergency Manager Joseph Harris said Tuesday that the second order was a mistake and both were in fact approved. The order regarding AluTech is on the city's website, and the New Products order has been taken down.

The two-step process by which the two companies were seeking tax breaks calls first for the establishment of an industrial development district, and then for the company to seek the tax abatements themselves.

AluTech already had an industrial development district. At a Dec. 14 public hearing, a company representative asked for a 12-year, 50 percent tax break, and that is what Harris approved in his Dec. 16 order.

AluTech is a Stevensville-based auto parts maker that bought the Bowater building on Paw Paw Avenue and plans to hire 40 people and start production at the plant in 2012. The tax break will cover \$17.8 million in new equipment and building improvements.

Cheryl Miller, CEO for Benton Harbor-based New Products, asked the city at a public hearing Dec. 14 to establish an industrial development district, which will allow her company to ask the city for tax abatements on certain equipment. New Products makes die cast aluminum and zinc parts and was established in the city in 1922. Miller said during the public hearing that her company wanted the tax breaks to upgrade old equipment and buy new equipment to build parts for fuel-efficient engines.

"We spend millions of dollars locally," Miller said. "The approval will allow us to be on equal footing with others in the area that have received these benefits."

This was the first time New Products has asked for a tax break from the city, Miller said.

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