

HUNDREDS OF NEW JOBS AT STAKE

Boat builder's plan to expand into Atlantis in jeopardy

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A CITY boat-building company wants to expand its business to Atlantis and triple its workforce, but can't do so because the council is still setting up procedures to put the land out to tender.

Now Robertson and Caine says although it understands the council had done what it can to speed up the process, the company may consider moving business to Ireland.

"They are very helpful, but within their limitations. We have identified Atlantis as the most viable place in Cape Town to expand our business. We are committed to going there. We are prepared to wait another month or so then make the call (to move)," Robertson and Caine director Ellian Perch said yesterday

"We were going to move to Ireland, but Gino Morelli, a famous boat designer from the US, commented that South Africa's labour was better than elsewhere in the world. He was impressed with our skills. We then decided we should expand business to Atlantis."

Atlantis was chosen because the company, with a workforce of 300, could not identify a suitable alternative site close to the city, he said.

Robertson and Caine has been in South Africa for 16 years and is currently situated in Woodstock. It builds about 80 boats a year.

Moving to Atlantis would mean employing another 700 workers and increasing its building capacity to 250 boats a year, mostly for international customers.

The company has already been rated one of the world's top catamaran builders.

"We don't want to put pressure on the council because we understand they are trying to solve the problem. We also don't want to put an exact date to it yet, but if we move out of the country, it will be a great pity for the industry. South Africa's boat building industry is the only one that can really compete with China," Perch said.

Ruby Gelderbloem, City Council director for property management, said several pieces of land in Atlantis were

to be put out to tender and this involved a number of processes, including identifying the sites, land use zoning and conveyancing.

She said tender documentation was almost complete and the next step was to advertise.

"Several land parcels are involved and the total extent has to be calculated.

"The tender documentation is 99% complete. The City is in continuous discussions with the applicants. Written communication has also transpired.

"They (applicants) were informed that all properties will have to go out to tender," she said.

About Robertson and Caine's job creation, Gelderbloem said: "The City would not want to lose this opportunity presented by the applicant, but has to follow the law as laid down by the National Treasury.

"The applicant will have an opportunity to take part in the tendering process.

"Council is doing everything in its power to expedite the tendering process within severe resource constraints."