

County APC slates August 26 vote on proposed biomass-energy plant in Scottsburg

Written by Marty Randall

Wednesday, 19 August 2009 00:00 - Last Updated Wednesday, 19 August 2009 08:43

A special meeting of the Scott County Area Plan Commission (APC) has been scheduled for 6 p.m. on Wednesday, August 26, at the Courthouse.

At this meeting, members of the APC will determine if a development plan submitted by Liberty Green Renewables L.L.C. meets their approval. If approval of the plan is given, development of the proposed biomass-energy plant can go forward.

Liberty Green partners have been working with Scottsburg officials and the Scott County Economic Development Corporation for several months. The site for the proposed plant is on some 44 acres accessed by U.S. Highway 31 South and just north of the city's newest water tower.

Larry Ott and Terrance "Terry" Naulty, both partners in the venture, represented Liberty Green at both the Scott County Board of Zoning (BZA) appeals and the APC meeting that followed on Wednesday, August 12.

They offered an attractive package, explaining that the local plant will be called the Scottsburg Renewable Energy Center and will be similar to a plant they are developing in Crawford County near Milltown. Once up and working, the Scottsburg center will generate enough electrical power for about 20,000 homes by burning wood chips that will in turn heat water, changing it to steam to power a turbine. Liberty Green will then sell electricity generated on the Midwest power grid.

Liberty Green was given a variance by the BZA to allow a main building of 100 feet. This structure will house the turbine and yards of pipe as well as its bubbling fluidized bed that will burn the wood chips.

During the BZA meeting, Scottsburg Mayor Bill Graham offered a statement of support for the plant. "This is almost a dream come true for us. The State of Indiana and federal government is pushing renewable energy hard. Our group from which we buy our power is required to have 10% renewable energy right now and that (percentage) will increase. We presently buy windpower from Iowa, even though we pay more than we make from it, to meet that 10% threshold. Our reliance on coal will have to lessen in the next few years, and this plant is one way to do that," the Mayor stated.

In the APC hearing, Naulty took the floor after Ott provided a sketch of the plant and explained its function.

In the presentation, Ott said the plant would rely on sources of wood waste from a 75-mile radius. Certain crops could also be grown to provide fuel for the plant, but its primary source will be chips.

Ott again stressed the economic impact: The estimated 18- to 24-month construction period could provide a \$20 million payroll with another estimated \$10 million worth of local material being purchased for construction. Once under power, the annual payroll was estimated at up to \$1,25 million. The plant will create 25 new skilled, technical jobs with salaries ranging from \$50,000 to \$75,000 per year. Another \$1,2 million can be generated in the estimated 30 to 35 collection and transportation jobs.

Naulty's part of the presentation involved environmental attributes. He described the biomass industry as "tightly regulated" by both the U.S. Department of Energy and the federal Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) as well as the Indiana Department of Environmental Management (IDEM). The renewable energy plant will have a neutral "carbon footprint," he went on. Outdoor piles of wood chips will fuel the "bed." He said the plant will keep a 30- to 60-day supply of chips on hand at all times. Water will be used and re-used. At least 480,000 gallons per day will be needed by the plant. Since the City of Scottsburg has a one million gallon-a-day

County APC slates August 26 vote on proposed biomass-energy plant in Scottsburg

Written by Marty Randall

Wednesday, 19 August 2009 00:00 - Last Updated Wednesday, 19 August 2009 08:43

capacity, that should be no problem, the engineer said. Approximately 100,000 to 170,000 gallons per day will be sent through sewer lines to the city's treatment facility. That emitted water will be compliant with drinking water standards, Naulty related. It's the mineral deposit build-up in the discharged water that will make it unusable, he added. A five-foot-deep pond to be built on the property will be used as a water source as well as a way to retain surface water and help drainage.

A transom line owned by Duke Energy will carry the power away from the plant and distribute it to buyers on the grid.

Ott said that, though the jobs will be "high tech," on-the-job training will be provided to those hired, and a high school level education will be required. The plant operator, manager and engineer will have higher qualifications.

On a question of fuel availability, Ott said he could not foresee a time when wood products would not be available. The plant will only use renewable fuel. No tires or trash will be burned there because of permit restrictions. Developers were also considering creating a local drop-off point for folks wanting to drop off tree limbs and the like.

Probable truck traffic created will be approximately 38 per day. That figure caused another discussion of the high rate of accidents in that area of U.S. 31. Ott and Naulty said developers will do what the Indiana Department of Transportation requires, and those requirements will include turn lanes.

If the development plan is approved, construction on the site will most likely begin next summer, advised Naulty.

Though the APC took nearly 1½ hours to consider the plan, a couple of members on the board were hesitant to pass the plan. Member Jim Craig said he simply could not make a decision until he studied the matter more deeply. That apparently was the conclusion of members John McDonald and APC Chairman Dale Hobbs as well, each of whom voted against its passage. Since one seat remains vacant on the board, that created a 3-3 tie which could not be broken. David Kilburn, who had made the motion to pass it based on his representation of the city, found himself and supporters Don Wilkerson and Jim Boswell defeated in that first vote.

Wilkerson offered a way out of the dilemma, offering a motion to reconsider passage at a special meeting. Settling on a 6 p.m. meeting on Wednesday, August 26, Kilburn seconded that motion and the matter was tabled until the special meeting convenes that date.

The public is welcome to attend this hearing.