
City wants tire study

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Erie City Council is asking the builder of the proposed tires-to-energy plant to voluntarily submit an environmental impact statement on the plant's operation.

But whether the city gets one remains to be seen.

The city can't require that it be done, and the project's local manager appeared to be less than enthusiastic about the idea before City Council members voted on it.

"Council's willingness to implement an opposition tactic is inappropriate," said Gregory J. Rubino, local project manager for Erie Renewable Energy, the plant's builder. "It sends a message to other industries who may want to look at Erie that complying with the law is not enough."

He also said the environmental impact statement, similar to those required by the federal government, is unnecessary because the same information will be provided as part of the plant's state permit applications that will be filed in December.

He said a vote like this would be more appropriate later, if council members feel something was missed during that review process.

To do so now, he said, is "pandering" to the plant's opponents.

Nevertheless, council voted 4-3 to request the study of the plant, a \$150 million facility that will be on the former International Paper Co. property.

Councilwoman Jessica Horan-Kunco, who sponsored the proposal, said the study will address the concerns that residents have raised about the project.

"We can't force (the company) to do anything," she said. "It would be a good-will gesture on their part. They said numerous times it's going to be safe. This documentation will back that up. I can't just take somebody's word for it. And this evaluation will prove that out."

President Rubye Jenkins-Husband also supported the study.

"We need to know as much as we can about the environmental impact it will have on our city," she said. "I think this is one way we can be informed."

Also voting in favor were David Gonzalez and Patrick Cappabianca.

Opposed were Jim Thompson, Curtis Jones Jr. and Joe Schember.

Thompson said council should wait until the company files its permit applications to the state Department of Environmental Protection and provides some facts on the plant's operations.

"I think we just may be a little bit ahead of ourselves," he said. "In December, when they put their cards on the table, then I will know whether I'm for or against it. I'm very concerned we're putting ourselves in an adversarial position with it."

Schember said council has never asked any developer to do this.

"I just don't like the message it sends, not only to this developer but others," he said.

Several residents asked council to support the study, including Randy Barnes, president of Keep Erie's Environment Protected, a group opposed the plant.

"I think council did the right thing," Barnes said afterward, pointing to unanswered questions about the plant. "Of course, this is nonbinding. The company has the right to completely ignore council."

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