
Foust joins foes of tire plant

Published 11/30/2007

Add County Councilman Kyle Foust to the list of those who don't want a tires-to-energy plant in east Erie.

Foust, a Democrat who represents County Council's 5th District and an announced candidate for Congress in 2008, went public with his opposition to the plant Thursday.

He also sponsored a resolution at the County Council Finance Committee session Thursday to try to get other council members to join him in opposing the plant.

Foust ultimately pulled the resolution from the agenda when he could not find enough support.

Council members said they were not comfortable taking a stand before the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection started its review of the project.

"I can't support something like this (resolution) until I get a little more information," Councilman Ronald Cleaver said.

Councilman David Mitchell said, "It is premature to put this on our agenda."

Prior to the meeting, Foust said he was convinced the plant was an ill-advised project. He said if his resolution failed, he would write his own letter to Erie Renewable Energy, the company that wants to build the 90-megawatt power plant that would use 30 million scrap tires a year.

"I have looked over the information for a couple of months," Foust said. "I am convinced this is not good for Erie County, and certainly not good in the middle of a residential area."

Plans for the \$200 million project that would build the nation's largest waste tire-to-energy plant on former International Paper property in east Erie have divided the community.

Erie Renewable Energy officials say the plant will offer 60 jobs and create other economic development opportunities while it provides the best environmental protection possible.

Opponents and environmental activists, mostly under the banner of the grass-roots group Keep Erie's Environment Protected -- or K.E.E.P. -- say they believe that emissions from the plant and the risk of tire fires present too great a risk to health and safety.

Foust is the latest public official that K.E.E.P. claims as an ally.

The group issued a news release Thursday, reporting they now have signed statements from Lawrence Park Township, Wesleyville Borough, Harborcreek Township and North East Township opposing the plant.

"Together those four municipalities represent more than 30,000 Erie County residents," said K.E.E.P. President Randy Barnes.

Foust said many of those residents in downwind communities are constituents in his council district.

"They are building a smokestack, and there is no reason to build a smokestack other than to release emissions into the air, and those emissions are going to flow downwind into my district," Foust said. "I consider this a quality-of-life issue."

Erie Renewable Energy has urged public officials and residents to wait to see the pollution-control data that will be contained in its air-quality permit applications before making up their minds.

Local ERE spokesman Greg Rubino said Foust is jumping the gun. "He doesn't know anything about the process, anything about the emissions, and he is opposed to it."

"It would be nice if he would call me and find out about the plant, find about the employment, the taxes, the economic development, and ask about the technology," Rubino said.

"I don't know why everybody is in such a hurry to come out against something they don't know anything about," Rubino said. "It is disconcerting to have that opposition to what would be a \$200 million investment in Erie."

Meanwhile, K.E.E.P. officials said they plan to keep pushing elected officials.

Tim Reim, K.E.E.P. communications director, said the organization is working on plans to ask Erie City Council to pass a Continuous Emissions Monitoring System ordinance, which would require any new industry to have continuous real-time emissions monitoring.

Reim said the group hopes to discuss those plans at its membership meeting at 6:30 p.m. Monday at Mount Calvary Catholic Church on East Lake Road.

Staff writer Kevin Flowers contributed to this report.

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