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## There's time to scrutinize energy plant

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Published 08/19/2007

Erie Renewable Energy LLC unveiled an ambitious plan last week to develop a tires-to-energy plant at its 65-acre parcel at the former International Paper Co. site. But perhaps the most significant news was its estimated timetable, which should relieve some pressure from supporters and opponents of the plant. There should be plenty of time for the public, state agencies and others to scrutinize plans for the plant, its technology, emissions and handling of tires.

In the company's best-case scenario, it will take three years to get permits, design and build the \$150 million power plant. If all goes as planned, it could start operating by the third quarter of 2010. It hopes to apply for environmental air-quality permits by Dec. 1, and it will likely take up to a year for the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection to conduct public hearings and otherwise evaluate whether the plant merits permits.

Erie Renewable project manager Vic Gatto, a partner in the Boston-based parent company Caletta Renewable Energy, and the two local sponsors, real estate developer Greg Rubino and Joseph McCormick Construction Co. President Owen McCormick, said the power generated by the plant would be sold through Penelec and to large business customers.

The electricity generated by the plant would be fueled by waste tires, and using circulating fluidized bed technology -- a process that does not burn tires, but relies on a chemical reaction for combustion to generate heat. As Rubino explained it, "The idea is to use tires to generate heat. That heat boils water. That water turns into steam. That turns a couple of big steam turbines, which will produce a net value of about 90 megawatts of electricity."

Rubino noted repeatedly that it is not a tire plant, and it is not an incinerator.

The three also worked hard to dispel claims by opponents that the plant would be an environmental menace. They said it would create no smell, no tire piles and no dangerous emissions. If it did, they said, they wouldn't want it, either. The plant would be completely enclosed, and whatever noise neighbors might hear would likely come from railcars, which would be used by Erie Renewable to transport tires, and by the nearby Lake Erie Biofuels plant to transport other commodities. About 12 railcars a day would bring tires into the plant, where the tires would be ground immediately into 2-inch chips.

The power plant will be designed to handle 30 million waste tires a year -- about 10 percent of the 300 million waste tires the nation generates annually. The plant's 60

employees, with yearly pay averaging about \$50,000, would be recruited from and trained in Erie.

Gatto, Rubino and McCormick made a good case for the plant, if it stands up to environmental scrutiny. Clearly, its location on a reused brownfield site is ideal, given a number of factors including proper zoning and separation from a residential neighborhood.

Remaining unresolved issues center on the plant's technology and environmental impact, as they should. They include a number of issues raised by a new group called Keep Erie's Environment Protected, which formed to challenge plans for the plant. Examining the track record of the few plants worldwide that use this new technology should be telling.

It will be the DEP's job to confirm this plant is what Gatto, Rubino and McCormick say it would be: an efficient, clean tires-to-energy plant that won't harm the environment.

There is nothing to gain by uninformed speculation. More information will be known relatively soon, then the scrutiny can begin.