
Tire plant plan burns crowd - Residents voice concern over IP site proposal

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A crowd of more than 150 people turned out Monday night to voice concerns about a new tires-to-fuel plant planned for the former site of International Paper Co. on East Lake Road.

The group, which packed the Admiral Meeting Room at the Blasco Library and spilled out into the lobby, came to the 6:30 p.m. meeting, which was organized by Keep Erie's Environment Protected -- an organization formed to protest plans for the \$94 million plant proposed by Erie Renewable Energy LLC.

The company and other project sponsors unveiled plans for the plant in March and are going forward with preparations.

The plant, the largest of its kind, would create 60 jobs and would use 800,000 tons of tires a day to produce enough energy to power approximately 70,000 homes, according to project sponsors.

The energy produced would be sold to Penelec.

Randy Barnes, who conducted the meeting for K.E.E.P., said the large turnout indicates residents' growing concerns about the effect such a factory could have on local air and water quality.

"The response points to how serious this is," Barnes said.

He encouraged concerned residents to raise community awareness and contact Erie City Council and Erie County Council members about their worries.

"I don't know why they don't put it someplace less populated," said Pearl Jeffries, 50, who lives at East Third and Parade streets. "You have the Boys & Girls Club right across the street."

The only public official who attended the meeting was state Rep. Pat Harkins of Erie, D-1st Dist.

"We have a second chance for this property," Harkins said. "I'd like to see something clean and green go in there."

He said that the creation of 60 jobs wasn't enough to compensate for the negative impact the plant would have on the area's environment.

"The neighbors are great people. They are willing to work with anybody," Harkins said. "They just don't want this in their backyards."

William Caldwell, 55, who lives on Lake Avenue, said that he didn't think the plant was a good idea for his neighborhood -- or for anyone else's.

"I think the idea of burning tires is ridiculous," Caldwell said. "We smelled the (International Paper Co.) fumes for years. We just don't need that inside city limits."

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