
Untiring efforts rewarded - Energy-plant opponents seek support from 2 more townships

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Opponents of the \$150 million waste-tire-to-energy plant proposed for the east side might get more municipal allies as they step up pressure against the project.

Lawrence Park Township and Wesleyville have already sided with opponents of the plant that Erie Renewable Energy proposes for the old International Paper Co. site on East Lake Road.

Now members of the opposition group Keep Erie's Environment Protected -- K.E.E.P. -- said they believe they will win support from Harborcreek and North East townships, as well.

Officials of the two townships have drafted a proposed joint open letter expressing their concerns about the plant's effect on air quality and opposing the project.

"We have drafted the letter with North East Township," said Harborcreek Township Supervisor Dean Pepicello.

Pepicello said he plans to put the letter opposing the plant on the agenda for the supervisors' Nov. 7 meeting.

"We don't want to come out against development and jobs, but the Pennsylvania Second Class Township code clearly states the supervisors must act to protect the public health, safety and welfare of residents," Pepicello said. "Until we hear that this plan is absolutely safe for our residents, we felt it was appropriate to have our voice heard."

North East Township officials could not be reached for comment.

K.E.E.P. President Randy Barnes believes his group is building momentum and that political leaders will feel increasing grass-roots pressure from constituents who oppose the plan.

K.E.E.P. has been stepping up activities and spreading the word of what it believes are the health threats posed by the plant.

Another K.E.E.P. officer, Dennis Stratton, said the group has found a great deal of concern in communities downwind of the plant.

Not all municipalities have acted. North East Borough Council decided not to take a position until it sees more details, Borough Manager Mark Proper said.

Erie City Council has asked Erie Renewable Energy to conduct a voluntary environmental-impact study.

Meanwhile, company spokesman Greg Rubino said ERE is still on target to file its state air-quality permit applications in the first week of December, and asked residents and municipalities to wait until that data is public before forming an opinion.

"This is important for us and for the community," said Rubino, the Erie real estate developer who serves as local project manager for ERE.. "We hope cool heads will prevail, and people will wait to see the facts and not act on suppositions."

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