

EUP Ethanol Plant Moving Forward as 'Heavy Industrial' Zoning Meets No Opposition

Public Hearing Draws Only One Comment

By Mark Tower

The cellulosic ethanol plant being proposed for Kinross Charter Township received the approval of the township's planning commission Monday night, August 10, and the project will now go before the township board Monday, August 17. The unanimous recommendation approved Monday is to change the zoning for the operation from "forest recreation" to "heavy industrial." It followed a hearing at which only one citizen spoke.

The plant is being proposed by Frontier Renewable Resources on a 355-acre parcel east of Kincheloe on Gaines Highway.

Harvey O'Brien was the lone citizen to speak at the public hearing, saying he would like to see the site plan before it is approved, which is the next step Frontier needs to make before beginning construction of the plant.

"If this is a site plan, I just want to make sure there is a buffer zone," Mr. O'Brien said. He said he has the only privately-owned parcel of land which adjoins the southeast corner of the area being developed by Frontier, and he would like to see some trees between his property line and the main parts of the facility.

The first blueprint he was shown did not have such a buffer zone, Mr. O'Brien said, but the next one he saw did, and he wants to make sure the final plan approved by the township has such a barrier between the two properties.

"I think there will be new jobs for the area," he said of the pro-

posed plant, "probably a little noise, a little odor. That's the price you pay."

Frontier Chief Executive Officer Steve Hicks told *The St. Ignace News* the final plan will include such a buffer.

"We have worked the with community and Harvey as a neighbor already," he said. "We'll continue to work with Harvey, other neighbors, and the community on the project."

Frontier Renewable Resources is a joint venture of Mascoma Corporation of Massachusetts and J. M. Longyear, a forest products company and owner of 76,500 acres of forested land in the Upper Peninsula.

Representatives from Frontier said they don't expect to submit a site plan until fall at the earliest, and would expect construction to start next summer and take about 18 to 20 months. If all goes as planned, the plant would open sometime in 2012.

Changes continue to be made to the Kinross facility plan as the new process is developed at the company's pilot plant in Rome, New York, said Alan Belcher, senior vice-president for operations at Mascoma.

"A lot of work has been done," said Mr. Hicks. "The project really started in November."

The operation will be funded through a combination of government grants, investment funds, and bank loans guaranteed by the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE).

DOE provided \$26 million and the state chipped in \$23.5 million through the Centers of Energy

Excellence Program created by the Michigan Economic Development Corporation.

Commissioner David Gaines raised questions about the certainty of the plant's financial future, since he had heard ethanol plants elsewhere in the country were having financial difficulties and that construction on some facilities has been delayed owing to changes in gas prices.

"It has not affected any of our financing," Mr. Hicks said. "The process here is going extremely well."

The difference, he said, is between ethanol plants using corn as the primary feed stock and Frontier's plant, which will use chipped pulp wood to make the fuel.

"Corn has a financial market," Mr. Hicks said. "The price of corn goes up and down. The price of timber has been very flat and very low for a very long time."

The cost of making the sugar from corn, necessary in the process, is about \$130 to \$140 per ton, while the cost using wood pulp is closer to \$90.

"There is a clear difference in the cost," Mr. Hicks said. "On the longer term, this is much more sustainable, both for the resources and financially."

Mascoma's research and development team is perfecting a system the company has developed to convert biomass to ethanol using a simpler, more economical, and more efficient method than used in the past.

Instead of a multi-step process of hydrolysis and fermentation to

turn wood pulp into sugars and eventually to ethanol, the new plant will use Mascoma's patented Consolidated Bio-processing technology, in which genetically-engineered microorganisms will be introduced to the biomass and turn it directly into ethanol.

This final product can be mixed at a 10% ratio with gasoline for use in normal vehicles, or mixed at an 85% ratio to create E-85, a fuel designed for newer flex-fuel vehicles.

Mr. Gaines said he fully supports the plant, and saw it as an improvement for the area and the nation.

"I want to see it happen," he said. "We need to get away from gasoline and over to ethanol, like Brazil did. Once we get independent of gasoline, I think it will get our country going again."

Another possible concern addressed at the meeting by representatives from Frontier was the actual harvesting of trees to feed the plant, planned to eventually produce 80 million gallons of ethanol annually.

Art Abramson, a forester now employed by Frontier, said the wood used at the plant would be similar to that used by the paper mill industry, the leftovers of the logging industry. After loggers sort trees for veneers, saw logs, and saw bolts, the remaining wood would be available for use at the new plant, he said.

"The key is, this wood doesn't have a value for anything else," Mr. Abramson said.

"We will not be clear-cutting hardwoods," Mr. Hicks said. The

one exception, he said, would be aspen, since the scientific and accepted method to harvest aspen is by clear-cutting.

Since the plant will require less biomass than is added each year through new growth, the supply of wood will continue to grow, even after the plant reaches its full capacity.

"There is at least enough wood here in Michigan to sustain an 80-gallon facility indefinitely," Mr. Hicks said.

Frontier filed a request for an air permit with the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality about two weeks ago, Mr. Hicks said, and that needs to be approved before the facility begins ethanol production.

"We've spent a lot of time, money, and energy on the project, and we're very optimistic about it," Mr. Hicks said.

Commissioners posed the question to Frontier representatives of "How many jobs, really?" the plant would bring in.

Mr. Hicks said construction of the plant is estimated to bring in 150 temporary jobs, the plant will employ 50 to 60 full-time employees, and the state has estimated about 500 jobs will be created in total, when accounting for spin-off transportation, logging, infrastructure workers, and other jobs associated with the industry.

"We think it's a very large employer," he said of the project.

The company is pushing to gradually have a more permanent presence in Kinross, Mr. Hicks said, and plans to open a general office somewhere at Kincheloe in the near future.

The Kinross Charter Township board will look at the Planning Commission's recommendation to make the zoning change at its Monday, August 17, meeting and will vote on it at the following meeting Tuesday, September 8.

Frontier will then need to submit a site plan to the township, which must be approved before construction can begin.

Hearing Rescheduled for Bowen

A preliminary examination for Dustan Bowen, who was arraigned in 92nd District Court on a multiple count warrant, including three counts of homicide, in connection with a hit and run accident in Gould City, has been rescheduled for Tuesday, September 15.

The examination was rescheduled from the original date of Monday, August 10, after Mackinac County Prosecuting Attorney Fred Feleppa asked for more time to gather information and prepare the case.

This change is routine for a case with so large an investigation, Mr. Feleppa said, and he had expected the original court date would be pushed back.

"It takes time to assemble all the paperwork," he said. Some of the information still being compiled by law enforcement and the prosecutor's office includes witness interviews, autopsy results, the accident investigation report, and laboratory work.

Mackinac County Sheriff Scott Strait said ongoing laboratory work and forensic investigations could take weeks to months to complete. Mr. Feleppa said he hoped to get the accident report within a few weeks, but said some of the lab work could take much longer.

Todd Flood of Flood, Lanctot,

and Conner in Royal Oak, who will be representing Mr. Bowen, said he agreed with the prosecutor's office that the depth of the investigation and number of things under review warrant the court date be postponed.

Three died and several were injured after the SUV truck driven by Mr. Bowen struck a group of people from behind as they walked on South Gould City Road Friday, July 31.

Those struck were walking south along the northbound side of the roadway and Mr. Bowen was driving south on South Gould City Road. Mackinac County Sheriff Scott Strait said his office and other police agencies are still investigating the cause of the accident.

Mr. Bowen, 28, of Sanford, was arrested early Sunday morning, August 1, after fleeing the scene.

He is being charged with three counts of second degree murder, three counts of failure to stop at the scene of an accident when at fault, resulting in death, one count failure to stop at the scene of an accident resulting in serious impairment, two counts of killing animals, and one count driving outside license restrictions.

Mr. Bowen is lodged in the Mackinac County Jail in St. Ignace on a \$1 million bond.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Proposals Have Little Potential for Karst Damage, Geologist Says

To the Editor:

I read with interest Pat Egan's letter concerning the "Niagara Escarpment." I appreciate his bringing this proposed project of the Forest Service to the attention of your readers.

While I am in basic agreement with his description of the project and its setting, I do not share his alarm for possible serious consequences from the proposed actions within the "karstic" site terrain. Part of the project area is properly identified as karst. The bedrock is a carbonate (limestone and dolomite), and the features that define karst (solution enlarged fractures and bedding planes, caves, sinkholes and subsurface drainage) are there. These features are all only minimally developed, however. While this karstic area is of local and regional significance, on a global scale it is of only minor importance. What makes it significant here is that Michigan has only a few areas of karst, most of them small. Many areas in the country have karst features of much greater magnitude. The caves in this general area, for example, are small, "crawl on your belly" openings, as compared to the places like Mammoth Cave and Carlsbad Caverns. Similarly, the other defining karst features are here, but are of minimal scale.

I am an engineering geologist with 50 years of professional experience, much of it dealing with karstic features in locations throughout the country. Having grown up and been educated here, I am familiar with the project area that is centered on East Lake, with the Niagara Escarpment, and with the rock formations at the project site. On Mr. Egan's sugges-

tion, I have had limited discussions with the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) Team Leader. I have obtained and studied a copy of the Forest Service's Draft Environmental Impact Statement, and have revisited the project area to refresh my memory.

In my opinion, the proposed activities have a very small potential for causing damage to the karst or the related hydrologic regime. The EIS reports that activities at least somewhat similar to those proposed have been carried out in the area surrounding the old Fiborn Quarry, west of the site. That property is owned by the Michigan Karst Conservancy, an organization dedicated to the protection and preservation of karstic areas within the state. The EIS reports that the Conservancy has "detected no effects as a result of harvesting activities" there. I expect similar findings on this project site if the protective restrictions and actions outlined in the EIS are carefully executed. While there may be other influencing factors related to elements of the project that are outside my area of personal expertise (the karst and related elements), I do not see reasons for altering the proposed project in any of its alternate schemes.

I have submitted expanded comments to the Forest Service along these lines.

F. James Knight
St. Ignace

Bakery Letters Bring Back Memories

To The Editor:

In regard to photos and a letter from Burt Krause about the Just Rite Bakery, I remember well Mr. Krause's very nice Mom and Dad having the OK Hotel, and Nelson's Bakery next door. "Aunt Susie" Conley was a favorite and a very kind lady to all us kids who frequented the bakery. The absolutely best brownies on the planet came from that building. I think Mrs. Henderson's candy store was on the other side of the hotel, a sweet place owned by a sweet lady. My family lived across the street on the water side in a house next to the then-city hall.

Thank you for *The St. Ignace News*, a way to re-connect with my childhood and keep up with the local scene.

Harriet Vallier Norgaarden
Minneapolis

St. Ignace News Policies

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All responsible letters will be considered for publication and may be edited. They must be signed and a telephone number must be included for verification. Personal thank-you notes, personal attacks against other people, form letters, and letters promoting political candidates are not accepted, although letters for or against ballot proposals are welcome.

Obituaries:

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Michigan Politics

By
George Weeks



Cash for Clunkers and Candidates

Today's focus is on cash for clunkers and cash for candidates.

• **Cash for Clunkers:** On Friday, President Barack Obama signed extension of an additional \$2 billion for the car rebate program that gives up to \$4,500 in federal subsidies if consumers trade in their cars for new, more energy-efficient models.

Senator Carl Levin (cited last week as the only Michigan lawmaker on Capitol Hill to not miss any votes since the new Congress got underway in January), said:

"This program accomplished what it was intended to accomplish. In just a few days, a quarter of a million Americans traded in their old car for a new model using the credits available from this program. That's a quarter of a million American families that (have) more fuel-efficient transportation; a quarter of a million transactions that will pump new money into local economies, and an incalculable boost to this nation's struggling auto industry."

Obama said the transactions, "are getting the oldest, dirtiest, and most air polluting trucks and SUVs off the road for good. Businesses across the country, from small auto dealerships and suppliers to large auto manufacturers, are putting people back to work as a result of this program."

Reality check: It's a good program, but not entirely a U.S. stimulus. Of the top 10 most popular vehicles purchased under the program, six are foreign models (the Ford Focus ranks second).

Detroit News Editorial Page Editor Nolan Finlay said it well: "as long as taxpayers are helping to buy cars for other people to drive, they ought to at least insist those vehicles carry the Made-in-the-USA label."

Regrettably, it's too late for that.

• **Cash for Candidates:** The Democratic candidates seeking to replace term limited Governor Jennifer Granholm have not said whether they will take public campaign funds for the 2010 primary. But there's a spat on the issue between two of the most active GOP contenders.

U.S. Representative Pete Hoekstra of Holland, the leading GOP contender in some early polls, has long zigzagged on the issue of campaign finance, including on accepting political action committee (PAC) money.

In 2002, he opposed public financing of campaigns, but now says he will accept up to \$900,000 in public matching funds for his gubernatorial primary campaign. That means he will be limited to spending about \$2 million in the primary, a pittance considering today's costs for TV ads.

But he told Associated Press veteran Kathy Barks Hoffman: "We're doing exactly the same thing that (ex-Gov) John Engler did, connecting with blue-collar voters at the level where they're at. That's the kind of

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