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— Eric Brending, Owner —

Hardhats want Pepsico plant in Albany to be built by local workers

ALBANY — Construction workers — plumbers, laborers, electricians, operating engineers, carpenters and others — are opposing a proposal by the City Council to create an urban renewal district that would primarily benefit a multi-billion-dollar corporation.

PepsiCo wants to build a \$250 million Gatorade Thirst Quencher and Propel Fitness Water facility in Albany that it says will create 250 jobs.

The problem is, SVC Manufacturing, a division of PepsiCo, has hired the design/build firm Haskell Company of Florida to construct the plant. Haskell, an affiliate of the anti-union Associated Builders and Contractors, says it will use out-of-state contractors to do the work.

According to city officials, a development agreement has already been signed by the city, Linn County, the State of Oregon and PepsiCo. That agreement obligates the city to provide public improvements at an estimated cost of \$22 million. City officials now want to form the urban renewal district to help finance the street and utility work needed for the project.

If the urban renewal district is not created, the city will have to find another way to raise the money, City Attorney Jim Delapoe told the Albany Democrat-Herald newspaper.

For its part, PepsiCo is obligated to build a 900,000-square-foot factory to produce Gatorade and Propel Fitness

water, as well as a 400,000-square-foot bottle-making plant.

At a public hearing Aug. 8, 31 people testified. Of those, 26 said they were against the project.

Even the Albany Planning Commission voted 5-2 to reject the formation of the district. A majority of commissioners thought the financing plan was too one-sided in favor of PepsiCo.

A lawyer representing two property owners located within the proposed URB told the City Council that his clients would pay all the tax costs. "All the benefits accrue to one owner (Pepsi)," said Kris Gorsuch, who then proposed enlarging the boundary to include more residential areas.

"An urban renewal district is not a bad idea, but when it is used to benefit the tearing down of industry standards, industry wages, industry benefits, it's something we have to stop," testified Lou Christian, secretary-treasurer of the Salem Building Trades Council.

"We are being used as fodder. We get very little out of this," he continued.

Christian, of Creswell, said transitory workers and their families can put a burden on public schools, emergency room facilities and other public services.

"They're going to make the money, then they're going to leave," he said.

Christian then asked the council to include language in the development agreement that would address construction issues "and not throw our construction workers under the bus."

Steve Carlson, president of Carpenters Local 1065, asked the council to put a face on their decision.

"We're taxpaying citizens who live in this community. To some, our piece (of this project) is very small. But it's big to us. We contribute to — not impact — local services."

Proponents of the urban renewal district (the Albany Chamber of Commerce and the Willamette Association of Realtors) cited the economic benefit of bringing in an estimated 250 jobs, averaging 150 percent of the median

wage in Linn County.

Several opponents questioned a \$47,868-a-year average wage PepsiCo would pay its workforce — as suggested by John Pascone, president of the Albany-Millersburg Economic Development Corporation.

Albany citizen Diane Hunsaker said she read that more than 100 of the proposed 250 jobs would pay between \$13-15 an hour. "I keep hearing 50 thousand a year. We need a breakdown of the number of jobs and the wages," she said.

Joe Baron, a business representative of the Pacific Northwest District Council of Carpenters, said he's heard it all before. "Pepsi says it will pay this and pay that. There is not enough information for this. I think there should be some guarantees. And the work should be done locally," he said.

PepsiCo has already asked for a delay in groundbreaking for up to three years, claiming market growth wasn't what it expected. Some citizens in the area, however, believe the proposed location may have issues with endangered species and that PepsiCo is awaiting the outcome of an impact study before spending any more money.

Following the public hearing, the City Council voted to modify its agreement with SVC Manufacturing to accommodate the delay.

John Paul Williams, representing Workers for a Livable Oregon, a group opposing the plan, said the city should have been accepting public comment and input and completing studies related to noise, water, traffic, growth projections, financing mechanisms, wetland and environmental impacts before any agreement or amendments were ever brought to the council.

"This is bad public policy," he testified. "(You've) essentially already authorized the construction of the Pepsi plant without the necessary checks and balance system that is in the City Code and the comprehensive plan. This should not be done without public comment."

Wade Thompson of Albany said PepsiCo already is "abandoning" a community in California to come to Oregon. "Wherever they can make the best sell. They've got ways out. Somebody offers a better deal, they'll take it."

Rick Nys, an engineer hired by Workers for a More Livable Oregon, said transportation studies also were incomplete and not based on industry standards.

He said some reports "don't even come close to meeting the city's requirements for tracking" and that future land-use development projects likely would be denied by the Oregon Department of Transportation.

The City Council is expected to make a decision on the formation of an urban renewal district at its Aug. 22 meeting.

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