

Power Plant Delayed

Proposed Coburg gas-fired generator hits resistance.

The West Cascade Energy Facility, a proposed 900-megawatt, natural-gas-fired power plant to be sited in Coburg, is facing new hurdles from local government. Several recent developments will delay permitting for the plant for at least 18 months.

Lane Regional Air Pollution Authority (LRAPA) has put a one-year hold on developer Gary Marcus' application for a permit to release emissions from the plant. To better assess the potential impacts that emissions could have on the airshed, LRAPA will do on-site ambient monitoring and collect wind data for one year.

Such monitoring is required under the federal Clean Air Act. But according to LRAPA, additional monitoring was not required. "Marcus could have insisted that we process his query immediately," says LRAPA Permit Section Manager Robert Koster, "but we applied what pressure we had, and he agreed to that [permit hold]."

Over the summer, the Lane County Board of Commissioners unanimously passed four motions — all introduced by Commissioner Peter Sorenson — regarding the proposed facility.

• First, the board reaffirmed its decision to withhold facility permits for the right-of-way of water transmission from the McKenzie River up Coburg Road toward the proposed power plant. In response, Marcus withdrew the permit.

"I decided that I couldn't get a fair hearing at the county and withdrew the permit. In the end, the state will grant it to me because legally, it should be granted," says Marcus. "It doesn't make any difference in terms of the project going forward; it just exposes the true intentions of the county commissioners, which are not to give this project a fair hearing." The developer adds that he would prefer to pursue plans to transport water via the Muddy Creek Canal that runs through Coburg farmland.

• The board passed a second motion to hold an executive session meeting with the Lane County legal counsel regarding the board's jurisdiction over siting of the proposed plant. Currently, the plant's siting permits are handled by the Energy Facility Siting Council (EFSC), a state agency. Groups such as Save Our Valley and Oregon Toxics Alliance argue that the local county commissioners ought to have jurisdiction over land use issues in Lane County. The confidential legal meeting, titled "Lane County versus EFSC," took place on Aug. 25.

• The third motion was to authorize a letter from the board to Governor Ted Kulongoski, inviting the governor to Eugene to discuss issues around the proposed facility.

• The fourth motion was to hold public hearings to allow proponents and opponents to present their perspectives on the proposed facility. The date of the hearing has not yet been announced.

In the meantime, Oregon Toxics Alliance (OTA) plans to present arguments against the proposed energy facility to city councils throughout Lane County. In collaboration with the American Lung Association of

Oregon, OTA will also host a forum series, "Breathless in Lane County," to address the dangers of local air pollution. The forums will be held on Oct. 4 and 5; see next week's Calendar for details.

These developments are timely in the context of new research on the effects of air pollution on developing lungs. According to a study released in the Sept. 9 issue of the *New England Journal of Medicine*, children who grow up breathing air contaminated with fine particulate matter have reduced lung capacity as teenagers. The proposed facility would release 326 tons of fine particulate matter annually.

According to Patrick Callahan, Asthma Program Coordinator for the American Lung Association of Oregon, teenagers with reduced lung capacity are not able to exercise as much as people with healthy lungs, and there may be other complications. Reduced lung capacity is a symptom for people with asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease.

OTA is working with citizens of Klamath Falls and Turner to oppose proposed power plants in those areas. "Eugene-Springfield-Coburg residents have to realize that there are people in Marion County and Klamath County that are battling these proposals too," says OTA Administrative Coordinator Lisa Arkin. "If you add up the wattage — 620 in Turner, 900 here, 1120 in Klamath — that's 2,640 megawatts. With that much wattage being proposed and the Northwest having a surplus, it helps us realize that this plant is intended to supply power to cities and states outside of the places where they would be built."

Despite recent decisions delaying the permitting of the plant, former Commissioner Tom Lininger says that the proposed facility is still viable. "People need to give this plant full consideration now as if it were to be built in the near future, because when they get their regulatory permit, they have many years in which to build the plant," he says.

Commissioner Peter Sorenson suggests that even if local government will not deny the proposed plant outright, enough concerns abound that agencies may delay approval of permits. "Government that is timid about approving a project often continues to process until the project dies," he says. "They just keep considering it, considering it, considering it — but they never do deny it. They just keep asking more and more questions."

City Councilor Betty Taylor, who sits on the LRAPA board, is asking some of those questions regarding the proposed plant. "I'm concerned about the visual part and the air quality. When they say that they're going to put the emissions so far into the air that it won't bother anyone, what goes up is going to come down somewhere on someone else. I don't think our air in the area is dirty yet, but I don't think we need more pollution, and I don't think the plant is necessary. And the people who live in the area are opposed to it," she says. "I hope it will not be approved. I don't know that it's the [LRAPA] board's decision, but anything I can do to prevent the plant, I will do."

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