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## Linden votes 'no' on plan for coal-to-gas plant

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The mayoral election is still a year away, but the lines between two candidates were clearly displayed Tuesday during a vote to end litigation and open up a waterfront industrial area for redevelopment.

Mayor Richard Gerbounka, an independent who is seeking re-election next year, lost this round when the majority of the City Council sided with Democratic Council President Robert Bunk, also a mayoral candidate, in opposing a memorandum of understanding by the city with DuPont to open its 98-acre industrial property for redevelopment. The approval of the memorandum would have included plans for a controversial coal degasification plant.

"It's upsetting that a majority of council turned this issue down. I'm very disappointed. To me it stinks of politics," Gerbounka said about the council's 7-4 vote.

Council members Joe Harvanik, Derek Armstead, Jack Sheehy and Robert Frazier, who are allied with Gerbounka, voted in favor of the project. The six other members, all Democrats, voted with Bunk, who had told them in advance that he wasn't sold on the plan.

Bunk, however, said he did not ask any council member to support his position.

Bunk said he had environmental concerns about PurGen's \$5 billion project, which proposed building a plant that heats coal under pressure to create electricity.

The gasification process would create carbon dioxide. The company planned to build a pipeline 70 miles long or more out into the ocean, injecting the carbon dioxide beneath deep ocean sediment. Pressure from the ocean waters was expected to prevent the gas from escaping.

Jeff Tittel, chairman of the Arthur Kill Watershed Alliance and New Jersey Sierra Club director, said Linden stood up for the environment, public safety and clean energy by denying PurGen access to the DuPont site.

Bunk said any plan has to be safe for city residents, and would like to see a new memorandum of understanding that would pay for the city to hire its own environmental expert. He plans to see if that can still be done.

"I left the door open," Bunk said.

## Litigation likely

Linden resident Rebecca Kerins-Tattoli said she didn't like that the coal plant is unproven technology. She was concerned about the memorandum of understanding, which would have changed the

DuPont property's designation as an area in need of redevelopment to one that would have given the company more control over future plans. Kerins-Tattoli was concerned that the memorandum was tailor-made the PurGen project.

Kerins-Tattoli predicted the topic will be a political hot button for next year's mayoral candidates if PurGen still wants to develop the DuPont site.

Without the memorandum, Gerbounka said the city is looking at many more years of litigation.

He's hoping to meet soon with representatives from PurGen, Morris Companies, which previously had development rights to the property, and the Union County Improvement Authority, the city's redevelopment agency, to resolve the litigation issues.

He said DuPont, which already has demolished buildings on the site and begun remediation work, may also return to the city's Planning Board to see if the property will continue to be designated as an area in need of redevelopment.

"We had an opportunity to move forward," said Gerbounka, adding the project would have brought jobs and substantial host-community benefits based on its \$5 billion cost.

Without the additional revenue, Gerbounka said, the city may have to look at raising taxes or reducing its number of employees, options he doesn't think the council members considered when they voted.

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