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Linden panel reviews rejected plans for coal-fueled generating plant

STAFF REPORT

A three-member City Council committee is reviewing all issues related to a coal-degasification plant rejected by the panel two months ago in hopes of determining whether the project should be reconsidered.

Meanwhile, Emily Rochon, an expert on carbon capture from Greenpeace International and author of "False Hope: Why Carbon Capture and Storage Won't Save the Climate," will discuss the technology during a meeting presented by the NJ Sierra Club and the New Jersey Environmental Federation 7 p.m. Wednesday, Dec. 16 at the Hampton Inn, 501 W. Edgar Road, Linden.

A panel discussion on clean energy and the environment will follow. Panelists will include Jeff Tittel of the N.J. Sierra Club, Bob Spiegel of the Edison Wetlands Association, Heather Saffert of Clean Ocean Action, Dave Pringle of New Jersey Environmental Federation and Peter Montague, an environmental activist.

In October, the Linden City Council rejected a memorandum of understanding with DuPont which would have opened up the 98-acre waterfront industrial property for redevelopment, and possibly the construction of a controversial coal degasification plant.

Mayor Richard Gerbounka, an independent in a heavily Democratic city, had supported the coal plant project as a way to bring jobs and host community benefits to the city.

Council President Robert Bunk, who had voiced his opposition to the proposal by PurGen to build a coal-degasification plant on former DuPont property, led the vote against the plan.

Bunk said he had environmental concerns about the \$5 billion project which proposed building a plant that heats coal under pressure to create electricity. The gasification process to produce electricity would create carbon dioxide. To address that, the company planned to build a pipeline 70 miles long or more out into the ocean, injecting carbon dioxide beneath deep ocean sediment. Pressure from the ocean waters was expected to prevent the gas from escaping.

Bunk questions what will happen if the pipeline is not built out into the ocean, leaving Linden with a coal plant and a chemical plant.

"I don't want that to happen," Bunk said. "We want assurances."

After the October vote failed, Bunk said he sent a letter to the council expressing his concern that the project didn't provide enough environmental safeguards for residents, the need for the city to hire a microbiologists or other expert knowledgeable about the design whose services would be financed by PurGen and the need for a professional labor agreement, in which labor unions would get jobs on

projects costing more than \$5 million.

Labor groups had turned out to support the project because of the need for jobs.

Bunk sent a second letter to council announcing plans to form a committee to further review the project. Councilmen Richard Koziol, Robert Frazier and Richard Puschel were all appointed to the committee. Frazier was the only committee member who had supported the project.

Bunk said the committee has been meeting on the project.

"They said it will be a slow process," Bunk said. "They have not finalized anything. The committee wants to take everything into consideration."

When something is finalized, Bunk said the attorney working with the committee will sit down and talk to PurGen officials.

Bunk said a new memorandum of understanding could go back before the council as long as all the concerns have been met.

Although no time line has been set for the committee to complete its work, Gerbounka said he's hoping the committee comes to a conclusion as soon as possible, probably after the holidays.
