

Plans To Build Power Plant in Oxford Resurrected

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OXFORD - Plans to build a gas power plant on the northern town line are being resurrected despite some opposition.

Competitive Power Ventures is proposing to build a 805-megawatt facility on an approximately 20-acre site in the Woodruff Hill industrial complex.

"The growth that Oxford is having now, and will have in the near future, will be promulgated and helped very much by the addition of this power plant," said Andrew McGeever, economic development director of Oxford.

Not all residents agree. At several town meetings held to address this topic, there has been a "mixed reaction," said Oxford's First Selectman George Temple.

Some residents of neighboring Middlebury are even less pleased.

"It's like a nightmare for the town," said Middlebury First Selectman Edward St. John.

The plans for the project originally belonged to Calpine Corp about 15 years ago, but after the business went bankrupt, General Electric took ownership. GE held onto the project for several years, but sold it to CPV within the last few years, said McGeever. GE is a minority partner in the current project, acting as an investor.

Although the original plans for the power plant already have been approved, CPV must get permission for design changes, said Andy Bazinet, director of development for CPV.

CPV plans to increase the output of the plant from its original figure of 550 megawatts to 805 megawatts. It also wants to minimize visual and environmental impact, Bazinet said. Tall structures will be lowered and air emissions will be lessened, he said.

After fighting the creation of a 500-megawatt plant for years, St. John said he is shocked that the facility may now be expanded to 805 megawatts - a change he calls "staggering."

The plant will generate approximately \$53 million dollars in tax revenue for Oxford over 18 years, Bazinet said. McGeever confirmed the figure and said the rate of nearly \$3 million per year is based on current energy consumption data, but if consumption increases, the tax could be raised as well.

Middlebury resident and liaison for groups that oppose the power plant, Ray Pietrorazio, is not only concerned about the noise and emissions the power plant will produce, but also the safety hazard created by its proximity to the Waterbury-Oxford Airport.

"I'm not against the power plant. I'm against the site," Pietrorazio said.

Temple said he does not understand the concerns of Middlebury citizens, since gas is much cleaner than coal and the noise pollution is minimal. "I really don't see their environmental issues at all," he said.

According to Bazinet, the project will help the entire region by creating hundreds of jobs during a two and a half year construction period and 25 full-time jobs when the plant is operational. CPV will also pay \$20 million in sales tax to the state for construction of the power plant.

If the updated approvals are passed, construction is slated to begin in the second half of 2015, and the plant should begin operation in June 2018, Bazinet said.

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