

Fracking Water Recycling Plant Opens Amongst Debate

Casey Junkins, The Intelligencer/Wheeling News-Register

City Councilwoman Gloria Delbrugge usually welcomes new businesses to Warwood, West Virginia, but she doesn't plan to be on hand when GreenHunter Water opens its natural gas frack water recycling plant. Following months of planning and public debate, GreenHunter has all the permits required to begin removing the old structures at the former Seidler's Oil Service site, directly adjacent to the Wheeling Heritage Trail. John Jack, vice president of business development, said work could begin as soon as this week.

"We are very, very close now. We hope to get the construction bids back soon," Jack said, adding it is likely the plant will not be open until February. "We wanted to have it open this year, but we got caught up in the debate with the city. Now, we are going to be hitting the rainy season for construction," he said.

"I won't be there to cut the ribbon for them," Delbrugge said. "I don't like them, I don't want them and I don't trust them." Nevertheless, Jack said once the plant is open, it will help reduce congestion on roadways by replacing truck traffic with barge transport. "Putting this product on inland waterways is safer and cheaper than shipping it by truck," Jack said, noting he hopes to hire 12-20 employees to work at the site. "We are going to clean up and improve the site from what it is now," he emphasized.

Jack said there will be 19 storage tanks at the site, but emphasized the old rusty tanks left over from Seidler's will be dismantled and removed, while the existing building will see renovations. He said approximately 30 trucks, each carrying about 100 barrels of brine water from local fracking operations, should arrive at the site each day once it is up and running. Officials with the Nuclear Regulatory Commission said the brine GreenHunter wants to recycle in Warwood can contain radioactive radium and radon. Despite concerns voiced by Wheeling city officials, the regulatory agencies do not believe the amount of radioactivity at the site should be hazardous.

Though radium, uranium and radon are considered radioactive, Jack said these elements will be minuscule in volume. He also said the company's workers will wear radiation detectors while on the job. However, Wheeling officials only approved "Phase 1" of the GreenHunter project, which does not include the barging portion of the recycling plant. Jack said he will return to the commission when GreenHunter elects to proceed with the barging aspect, which he now believes could be sooner than later. He estimates only one loaded vessel will leave the Warwood dock each week.

Commander Emily Saddler of the Eighth Coast Guard District said recently said the

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Hazardous Materials Division is currently developing policy guidance for that issue. If the recycling plant is operational before the Coast Guard grants permission for barging, Jack said GreenHunter would remove the waste by truck. Tom Connelly, assistant director of the Wheeling Economic and Community Development Department, said GreenHunter would also need a zone change to use the docks extending out into the Ohio River from the former Seidler's. Connelly said the Wheeling Heritage Trail and these docks are now zoned for residential use, rather than industrial use. However, Jack disagrees that a zone change is needed.

"We have a utility easement for the pipeline to service the facility and barges," Jack said, noting he believes the trail will not be impacted at all by his company using this pipeline. Still, Delbrugge said she is eager to see what else GreenHunter will seek to do at the Warwood site. "I don't think there will be anything else on this before the city until they get to 'Phase 2,'" she said.

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