

Bangor council backsnew Fiberight waste-to-energy plan

Bangor plans to send its trash to a future waste-to-energy plant in Hampden after 2018.

In a 7-2 vote Monday night, the Bangor City Council entered a municipal joinder agreement with the Municipal Review Committee, meaning the city will follow the group's recommendation and send its waste to Fiberight, not Penobscot Energy Recovery Co. in Orrington.

"This move represents an economical and sustainable decision for our city and region," Councilor Josh Plourde said after the vote.

The reasons for support varied. For some councilors, it was an issue of saving money over the long term. For others, it was in part due to frustration over PERC's actions.

Councilors David Nealley and Gibran Graham were the dissenting votes. Both expressed concerns about the process and questioned whether the City Council had been given enough time to fully vet the issue.

"What's the rush?" Nealley asked.

Other councilors countered that they had spent dozens of hours researching the issue, reviewing materials provided by both sides and learning about the proposals in meetings during the past month.

Bangor officials say the city stands to save \$4.8 million over the next 15 years by going with Fiberight over PERC, in part because of lower tipping fees offered by Fiberight.

"It costs taxpayers less money to go with the Fiberight proposal," Council Chairman Sean Faircloth said. "That is a big item to consider."

Bangor's decision carries large implications for the viability of both facilities, as many smaller communities could look to Bangor while determining whether to side with Municipal Review Committee and Fiberight or PERC.

In early 2015, Fiberight earned the backing of the Municipal Review Commit-

tee, a group representing 187 towns and cities that currently partner with PERC. That decision followed a three-year search for companies to handle the trash load after PERC's contract expires in 2018.

The partnership with PERC came into question several years ago, after it became clear that the plant's financial situation would change after 2018 when its contract with Emera Maine expires.

PERC never submitted a proposal during the municipal group's search for a new company, arguing it already was operating as a partner. But the company later came forward with a new proposal, arguing it could stay open with a smaller staff and by making facility changes to stay economicaly viable.

For the Municipal Review Committee, it was too little, too late, setting up the debate for nearly 200 Maine towns -- stick with the committee or break off to stay with the waste-to-energy plant they've been using for decades.

Fiberight plans to build a privately funded \$60 million to \$70 million facility in Hampden that will convert organic materials in household trash into marketable biogas. The municipal

group would buy the land, leasing it to Fiberight.

Critics have questioned the technology Fiberight is proposing, arguing that it's untested in the United States. Fiberight says that while there's only one other operational facility like this in the U.S. -- in Virginia -- they're commonplace and successful in Europe.

So far, Brewer, Bar Harbor and Hampden are the only other towns to make decisions. Each has gone with Fiberight, sticking with the Municipal Review Committee.

PERC officials are scheduled to make their pitch to town officials in Orono at 6 p.m. Tuesday.

If enough communities sign on to the Fiberight proposal, the project will be able to move forward with construction. Fiberight officials say they will need enough towns to commit to sending a minimum total of 150,000 tons of waste annually in order to operate. Currently, Municipal Review Committee member communities send about 180,000 tons of waste annually to PERC.

Bangor, the largest member of the municipal group, could account for nearly 30,000 tons, or about 20 percent, of Fiberight's needs.

-Nick McCrea



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EVERY PIG HAS ITS DAY



MICKY BEDELL/BDN

Lillian Crocker (from left), Diana Lindsay, Ruth Carter, Dottie Bridges and Marilyn Doble listen to Frederick "Kim" Chatfield (not shown) talk about his therapy pig, Snuffles, during a visit to the Phillips Strickland House in Bangor on March 1: National Pig Day. Snuffles is a 4-year-old American potbelly pig owned by Kim and Debbie Chatfield of Rockport, who bring Snuffles around to assisted living facilities and other places to visit with people.

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needs a bone marrow transplant to save his life. But first, he needs a matching donor.

Six out of 10 patients in need will not receive a bone marrow transplant. That's why Tim's family and community are hosting a drive to sign up new potential donors for Tim and for children and adults like him. Signing up as easy: Swab the inside of your cheek and complete a form. Please join us!



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