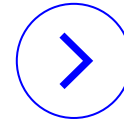


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Proposed biomass recycling project could bring jobs to Rock Falls

City in talks with Dixon-based company; facility would set up near sewer plant

Published: Tuesday, Jan. 24, 2017 10:49 p.m. CST • Updated: Tuesday, Jan. 24, 2017 11:56 p.m. CST

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ROCK FALLS – City leaders gathered Tuesday to learn more about two possible business ventures – one that would be run by the city, and the other by a private company.

The Committee of the Whole heard presentations by Magellan, the city's broadband consultant, and Green Vision International. The meetings give council members an opportunity to discuss particular issues at length, but no action is taken.

Green Vision International has been working with the Illinois Sustainable Technology Center at the University of Illinois on a biomass recycling project that could be launched commercially in Rock Falls.

Don McFarland, vice president and chief operating officer at Dixon-based Green Vision, told the council that the technology would use human and animal manure to produce biocrude oil and algae.

“The back end of the biomass conversion process is used to produce various strains of algae that have a variety of business uses,” McFarland said. “We would start with three algae models, but there are many types.

Users of the algae, which is difficult to produce in large quantities, include the food, pharmaceuticals, and cosmetics industries.

McFarland said the company made the decision in October to go commercial with the technology.

“We invited several communities to come to our presentation in Champaign, and Rock Falls became engaged in the process,” McFarland said.

The facility needs a nearby wastewater treatment facility, and Rock Falls has room for expansion at its site.

While the company could start the business immediately in several other states, Illinois is its first choice, largely because of its relationship with the University of Illinois.

McFarland said about 200 tons of waste a day is needed to operate the facility as planned. He has been speaking with several municipalities, including Polo and Freeport, about being a waste provider.

McFarland said the cities involved could save more than \$3 million on waste costs.

“The savings could be used to pay for sludge,” Mayor Bill W.

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The city would have to pay for the facility.

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Wescott said the opportunity is attractive to the city for several reasons.

“The prospects for job creation are exciting, because in addition to jobs created at the facility, this could become a hub for secondary businesses that grow from the byproducts,” Wescott said.

McFarland said the city hasn’t been asked to invest in the project, and he would like to keep it that way.

“We will have to be creative, however, to make financing work in a state with no budget,” McFarland said.

Green Vision had been optimistic about getting some economic development funding from the state, but that door closed during the budget impasse.

Whiteside County Economic Development Director Gary Camarano asked for particulars on the business model, including how much of an investment was needed.

McFarland put the figure between \$10 million and \$13 million. When fully operational, the facility would employ about 108 workers with a mean annual salary of slightly more than \$40,000. Five acres of land would be needed to start operations.

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