RECAP

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Koochiching County is seeking $12 million in bonding from the state Legislature for the RECAP project. The Legislature is expected to bond for just less than $1 billion in the next session, which begins Feb. 25.

Detailing specific production facts about the project, Howard said it would gasifying 200 tons of waste per day, which would mean it would have to pull waste from outside Koochiching County. They're talking to outlying counties, like St. Louis and Itasca counties, he said, as well as areas in Canada about bringing waste into the facility.

"If you were to put a pin in the map, go out 150 miles, and draw that circle," he said. "That's the footprint in which we could pull waste in."

The project would produce synthetic gas that can be converted into 2.6 million gallons of fuel per year, Howard said. That fuel could be gasoline, biodiesel, or even jet fuel, among other options. The different options for an output product means many parties are interested in the project, he said.

"There's a lot of people who are interested in receiving the output of what we have the potential to bring to light," he said. "People like the military, people who run fleets, there's a lot of biodiesel or diesel usage that happens up in this neck of the woods."

Howard and Korstad spent time during the presentation dispelling misconceptions that had been put forward during the process. On the issue of noise, garbage odors, and gull infestations that might occur because of the facility, Howard pointed to similar facilities in Minnesota. The Hennepin Energy Recovery Center, a waste incinerator, is located next to Target Field in Minneapolis.

"If there were odors coming off this facility, these people paying their season tickets, you best believe this stadium would not fill up if there was an odor," Howard said.

These facilities operate by bringing trucks in, closing the door behind them, offloading the waste, opening the doors, and having the truck leave, Howard said. No waste processing takes place outside or with the doors open, he said.

Howard also mentioned Prairie Lakes Municipal Solid Waste Authority, which operates the Perham Resource Recovery Facility in Perham, and a facility in Polk County located in a residential neighborhood near athletic fields. The RECAP facility will also operate under negative pressure, he said, meaning the facility will be inhaling. This means it will be constantly drawing air in, thus keeping any odor from escaping.

The material recovery facility will operate on an 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. Monday through Friday schedule, Howard said, meaning the facility will only be receiving waste during those hours. The gasifyer will be working 24 hours a day, but the facility will have enough waste on hand to support the system during the hours it isn't receiving waste, he said.

The waste the facility will store will be wrapped and "hermetically sealed" in bales, Howard said, which helps contain odors and makes it easier to control the gasification process. The bales stored on-site will be kept in an indoor silo, he said. It's a process more prevalent in Europe that has made its way over to the U.S., he said. If waste is brought in that's not wrapped in bales, the facility will process, wrap, and bale it indoors.

The facility will receive about 50 trucks per day to meet production requirements, Howard said, and will be working with the existing waster transfer site. Trucks will mainly use Highway 11 and Highway 332, he said, so they'll avoid going directly through International Falls or up the central corridor or Ranier.

"In fact, this is the truck route that Boise uses, at least half of it, for its traffic," he said.

As far as haze and air pollution go, Howard said there are numerous agencies, like the U.S. Department of Energy, the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, Koochiching County, the city of International Falls, which all have pollution standards the facility will have to meet. The project wouldn't be able to move through the process towards construction if it didn't meet those standards.

"We won't be able to do that unless this technology and the integrated solution meets those fundamental requirements: state, federal, and local," he said. "We have to be bulletproof."

As far as city and county benefits, Howard said the project could create 75-100 construction jobs, as well as 12-18 well-paying operational jobs. These technical, operational jobs would pay between $30,000-$50,000 per year, Korstad said. The facility could partner with Rainy River Community College to provide training for these jobs, he said.

The project would provide landfill relief, as well as increase recycling rates in the county, Howard said. The facility would make the area a national waste-to-energy leader, and provide energy reliability for the region. It would be a sign of environmental stewardship, and Koochiching County would be leading the way, he said.

"There's got to be a better solution out there than putting some 7,000 tons of waste that this community produces, and putting it in the ground," Howard said.

The plasma gasification process, aside from producing synthetic gas which can be converted to fuel, also produces steam and slag, Howard said. The steam can be used to power a generator and produce electricity for the facility, he said. The slag, which is inorganic material that can't be converted to synthetic gas, can be reintroduced to the process, and be gasified to a certain point, until it can't be reused. At that point, the waste slag can be sent to a landfill, or made into a product like tile, but it can't be sold as slag, he said.

Coronal has put together a "first-class engineering group," Howard said, and while there's still a long way to go, proceeding with the process will allow them to answer more questions about the details of the project.

"It's your decision," he said. "We just want to step through and get all the answers to be able to answer those questions. We're getting there."

This process started six years ago because at an Association of Minnesota Counties meeting, with all the counties represented, Koochiching County was the one to reach out and engage Coronal, Howard said.

"For that, thank you, Koochiching County," Howard said. "It's been an interesting journey."

TOYS

➤ continued from A1

This was Virginia's second year doing the toy drive, and Myers said the community filled six ambulances with donations. Hoping for a similar increase next year, Myers said local organizers will rethink the event, and maybe have the donation days on the Friday and Saturday after Thanksgiving. They also might move the donation site to Kmart, he said, to better pull in the shopping traffic.

STAFF PHOTO BY SPENSER BICKETT

Police Cpt. Tom Lynch helps unload toys from the ambulance Monday at the Salvation Army. The toy drive was a collaboration between the Falls Fire Department and the Falls Police Department.

COUNTY

➤ continued from A1

Waldron said he has been "in touch" with county officials about the Dec. 10 incident, which he said was caused by a northbound train stopped at the crossing.

"We work hard to minimize blocked crossing delays and don't want to see trains on the crossing that long," he said. "We will be looking into the cause and why that train was there and working to correct that. We are continually working to minimize the issue of blocked crossings at Van Lynn and the Spruce Street in Ranier."

Commissioner Wade Pavleck, who represents Ranier, wondered if county officials need to discuss the issue further with the right CN staff.

Jespersen reiterated concerns about safety when crossings are delayed. He said buses cannot go around activated crossing arms without law officer direction. That means children can't get delivered to, or picked up from their homes when trains are blocking the crossings.

Others have also raised concerns about how emergency services could be delayed while trains are blocking crossings.

County Board Chairman Kevin Adee reminded the board he missed an entire county board meeting when a train blocked the crossing at the Van Lynn Road.

Grotberg said in eight deputy shifts, blocked crossings have been documented eight times. He said he will ask all deputies to document reports or incidents of blocked crossings to better understand the problem.

"It is getting more prevalent," he said.

Jespersen said it appears CN simply has too many trains on the tracks to handle well.

"It's time to give them paper, to do a formal complain and send it corporate," he said, where officials may be unaware of the problem.

Meanwhile, Pavleck said he didn't want the citation to slow progress being made on other CN projects.

Highway Engineer Joe Sutherland described plans for three projects involving CN: Establishment of a quiet zone in Ranier, which requires CN cooperation; installation of signal lights and crossing arm at Ranier, scheduled by CN for the summer of 2014; reconstruction of the Ranier crossing by CN for the summer of 2014.

"There is a lot of discretion by CN about when they get this done," Sutherland said of the last two projects.

Waldron said the other projects have been in the works for some time and involve a number of jurisdictions, including Ranier, Koochiching County and the Federal Railroad Administration. "That work will continue," he said.

Naglosky told the board he's encouraged to hear CN has been working with the county on the projects "but I would hope they would not use that cooperation on one problem as an excuse to violate the law with impunity on others... I hope they would not 'take our crossing and go home.'"

Grotberg said issuing a citation will "get it into the system."

Adee said a lot of area residents have been waiting for action against CN for blocking the crossings, "even though (paying the fine is) pocket change for them."

"It may be pocket change to them, but it's the right to get home for residents," Naglosky said.

BOARD

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Board member Gordy Dault said he didn't want to lose sight of work the Blue Ribbon Panel has done in pinpointing ways to better the district.

"We really need to stay on track with getting some focus on those goals," he said.

Board member Willi Kostiuk said the board should consider setting aside money to hire a consultant and capping the amount around $4,000.

"I definitely have a problem with (spending) $12,000," he said. "I believe we have to have some help...but not worth that much."

He added it was especially critical to watch spending during a time the board is considering cost adjustments because the district's declining enrollment has resulted in a loss of about $480,000 in state funding.

Meanwhile, as the board considers making cost adjustments, members Monday agreed to work with Nelson on developing cost-saving initiatives through employee early retirement incentive packages.

"At this time, I don't have a number for you as far as how many (employees) may be interested," Nelson said. "But I have been approached by two people."

In other business, the board set the district's 2014 levy at $2.29 million – an increase over last year's levy of $1.96 million.

Nelson said the increase comes from the number of levies the district works with, several of which he said "jumped" this year. In addition, he said there are new levies the district is allowed to utilize that add to the increase.

"New levies increases the local effort, but decreases the state's budget," he said.

The board also Monday:

- Approved a handbook for a co-ed trap shooting league. In August, the board agreed to endorse offering a clay target league to students in the spring. The activity has been exploding in popularity with about 215 schools across the state signing up. The sport hasn't been picked up as an official state school sport, but Kevin Grover, athletic director, said the possibility exists.
- Adopted a resolution to expel an unnamed student, who according to documents read by board Chairman Darrell "Boxer" Wagner, was distributing drugs on school property.
- Approved the hire of Alex Ringhofer as a .63 full-time equivalent secondary math teacher for the remainder of the 2013-2014 school year.
- Agreed to increase the hours of Tom Vollom, who teaches Ojibwe II, Ojibwe III and American Indian Studies, from .5 FTE to .8 FTE.

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Thank You