

Plans for Rosemount gasification facility spark concerns

The trash-to-fuel plant has neighboring towns worried about potential effects on water, air and land.

By **KATIE HUMPHREY**

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What an ironic name, 'Rational Energies'

There's absolutely nothing rational about encouraging waste and calling it "green. Plans for a plant outside Rosemount that would turn trash into diesel fuel are moving along, despite early concerns from nearby cities. The Empire Township Board approved a zoning change and comprehensive plan amendment Tuesday that will allow Rational Energies LLC to build a 200,000 square-foot biomass gasification facility on about 50 acres at the intersection of Hwy. 52 and County Road 46.

Eden Prairie start-up Rational Energies will have to comply with an environmental review and permitting processes, which could take months or even years, before construction can begin. If all goes according to plan, the facility could be producing diesel in 2012. Although there was little discussion at this week's meeting, both Rosemount and Coates have raised concerns about the facility in letters to the Empire Township board.

Rosemount questions waste

Rosemount officials questioned whether the site on the city's southern edge and near UMore Park, an area that could one day be developed to draw 30,000 new residents, was appropriate. In his letter to the township board, Mayor Bill Droste said more needed to be known about the facility's effect on the environment, including air quality, water demand and disposal of the ash produced in the gasification process. He also expressed concern about the amount of waste the facility would require and how it would get there, citing an estimated 300 truck trips each day. "When you look at the amount of municipal waste that they would be processing here, it would be more waste than what's in Dakota County today," Droste said.

County board members, who heard a presentation about the presentation this week, also wondered about the amount of waste that will be needed to supply the facility. Ed Driscoll, CEO of Rational Energies, said the company anticipates using nearly 700,000 tons of trash daily to produce 28,000 million gallons of diesel annually. The nearly 2,000 tons of trash the facility would use daily is about one-third of the total trash produced in the metro area after recycling.

Concerns in Coates

The mayor of Coates, a small burg to the north and east of the proposed trash-to-diesel facility, wondered about what other types of zoning would be appropriate for nearby parcels, currently labeled agricultural. In his letter to the township planning commission, Mayor Jack Gores said industrial use seems compatible but unlikely on nearby Coates properties, because they lack sewer and water hookups. He also asked the township board if they discussed how such zoning would "affect land values and the prospects of any land owner being able to market their lands in the future."

Driscoll said the company will work with the cities and residents throughout the environmental review and site plan process to address any concerns. They want to build a facility that makes sense environmentally, economically and socially, he said. "We want to be good neighbors," he said. Township board chairman Terry Holmes wished company representatives well after the board approved the land-use changes. "OK, gentlemen," Holmes said. "It's a long battle, a lot of stuff to go through. It'll be interesting."

Katie Humphrey • 952-882-9056