

PORTAGE DAILY REGISTER



Columbia County's Daily Newspaper

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Didion citation fuel for meeting

By Ann Marie Ames, Daily Register

CAMBRIA — A notice of violation was fuel for the opposition of a proposed ethanol plant Monday night.

The notice from the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources dated April 5 cited Didion Milling for failing to install filters on silo vents at its Cambria facility. In reaction to the letter and other concerns, the Village Board voted unanimously to hire an attorney to draft suggested conditions for an ethanol plant Didion Milling has proposed to build just outside of Cambria, adjacent to the current facility.

"They are having a hard time maintaining their current permits," said Trustee John Domino. "These are the types of things we need to ensure they are doing for our safety. This is just a grain silo. They are proposing a distillery."

The letter of violation was sent to Didion in response to concerns raised during an unannounced tour of the plant by DNR air management specialist Mike Sloat in March. Sloat's visit noted 13 concerns about air quality controls at the grain storage facility. Didion was cited for failing to install fabric filters on silo vents.

Dale Drachenberg, Didion's vice president of operations, told the Village Board that the fabric socks were not installed because engineers hired by Didion felt that they were not a safe solution.

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"We had (the engineers) design a safer solution, which we are in the process of going to the DNR with now."

According to the notice of violation, Didion could be fined \$25,000 per day per violation. Sloat would not comment on the process of enforcing the air filter violation, as an investigation is ongoing.

A proposed ethanol manufacturing plant adjacent to the current facility, but located within the town of Courtland, has been vocally supported and opposed by members of the community.

The village board passed a resolution against the plant in June. That recommendation is merely advisory, as the Columbia County Board of Supervisors will make the final decision whether to approve a conditional use permit for operation of the plant.

Monday's special meeting was called in order to allow the board to weigh in on conditions for



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operation of the facility, should the Columbia County Board go against the Village Board's wishes and approve a conditional use permit for the proposed plant that could manufacture 40 million gallons of ethanol a year.

The board will call upon Madison attorney Richard Lehmann to draft conditions on its behalf. The board will then call another special meeting, likely on the Thursday or Friday before Labor Day, according to Trustee Jim Pharo.

The conditional use permit application will go before the Columbia County Planning and Zoning Committee on Sept. 5. The committee's ruling on the permit will be advisory to the full County Board. Didion plans for the mill to be in operation in 2007.

John Mueller is a member of Cambrians for Thoughtful Development, the citizens' group which brought the notice of violation to the attention of the Village Board.

"I think it's high time that they pursue this," said Mueller about the Village Board's plan to help write conditions for the plant. "Of course we would like the County Board to just flat out turn it down. But if they don't, we the people who have to live out here by it should be involved in writing the conditions. There should be stringent conditions."

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