

PORTAGE DAILY REGISTER



Columbia County's Daily Newspaper

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Cambria still opposes ethanol plant, discusses limits if it is built

By Ann Marie Ames, Daily Register

CAMBRIA — No means no. But in case it doesn't, the Cambria Village Board has drafted a list of operating conditions for a proposed ethanol plant.

At a special meeting Thursday night, the board made three motions in relation to the plant proposed by Didion Milling, two of which will be read as part of a public hearing Tuesday before the Columbia County Planning and Zoning Committee.

The first motion requests that the committee deny the conditional use permit outright on the basis that the proposed site is too small, operation of the plant would affect the quality of life of village residents and that the village has repeatedly voted to ban this type of operation in and around Cambria.

The second motion lists a set of "strong" conditions drafted by Special Counsel Richard Lehmann. The conditions will be read as testimony to the Planning and Zoning Committee as suggestions, should the committee decide to approve the conditional use permit.

"I feel better," said resident Bonnie Smith about the suggested conditions, which the Planning and Zoning Committee still could reject. "I think that they protect us some. It's better than nothing."

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The third motion states that the village will move forward in the process of declaring eminent domain over Cabbage Road, which runs perpendicular to Highway 146 next to Didion's current grain storage facility in the village. The 10-acre site of the proposed ethanol plant is across Cabbage Road from the current facility in the town of Courtland.

According to Lehmann, the strongest argument against allowing an ethanol plant to operate next to the village is that the 10-acre site is too small to contain the effects of operation.

"The size of the site makes it highly unlikely that impacts of pollutant discharges, traffic and parking, noise, lighting and other forms of impact will be able to be confined to the site," Lehmann wrote in a memorandum to the Village Board.

Lehmann told the 20 attendees of Thursday's meeting that the size argument is the most

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likely to result in the county denying a conditional use permit, as the site has already been rezoned industrial.

"It's the one thing that can't be addressed by conditions," Lehmann said.

The village's proposed conditions do address several pages' worth of other concerns about the operation of the proposed plant. The conditions demand the correction of all state and federal environmental deficiencies on the existing milling property and that Didion pay for air quality monitoring stations. The conditions address odor, groundwater and wastewater treatment issues and demand that Didion is prepared to coordinate with the fire department in case of an emergency as well as ensure values are guaranteed to current property owners in the village, should residents decide to move.

According to Lehmann, all conditions placed on the Didion plant, should it be approved, would be deeded to the property in the case that it were sold.

In the case of the uncertain ownership of Cabbage Road, Lehmann told the board it was their absolute right to declare eminent domain. He suggested the village do so in order to be able to better regulate the activities taking place on the road, such as the amount and type of traffic.

Trustee Tim Perry questioned the wisdom of spending money in a fight with Didion for right-of-way on the road.

"It's nice to go do stuff, but are we just spending money down the road?" Perry said. "It's like when you're doing your budget at home. You say, 'I want to fight this,' but there comes a time when it's not worth it."

"We don't have the \$2,500 in the budget to pay you now," Perry told Lehmann.

After a comment by a resident that some have given money to the village to help cover attorney fees, Clerk Lois Frank confirmed that the village has received \$1,000 in donations so far.

A copy of Lehmann's suggested conditions will be available at the village office and at the library starting today. Copies also will be posted in the front window of the Village Hall and the Post Office. Lehmann asks that any residents with suggested changes contact Frank by 10 a.m. Tuesday.

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