

PORTAGE DAILY REGISTER



Columbia County's Daily Newspaper

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County lets ethanol plant proposal simmer

By Ann Marie Ames

Tempers ran high at times in a debate Tuesday about a proposed ethanol plant in the town of Courtland, but the County Planning and Zoning Committee chose to let the debate simmer for one more month.

After hearing two hours of testimony during a public hearing Tuesday, the Columbia County Planning and Zoning Committee decided it needed more time to approve a conditional use permit for the proposed Didion Milling ethanol plant.

Dozens of neighbors, ethanol experts, farmers and concerned citizens from across Columbia County gave more than two hours of testimony both for and against the plant Didion Milling has proposed to open adjacent to its current dry grain facility, which operates in the village of Cambria. The proposed \$70 million plant could provide 40 new jobs, and would operate across village lines, just south of Cabbage Road.

"There was a substantial amount of information we had not seen before," said committee chairman Doug Richmond. "We need to sit down and go through it. It is possible that we may want to make some changes or do some tweaking to the conditions (Columbia County Planning and Zoning) staff has provided."

Last week, the Village of Cambria Board of Trustees requested the county deny the conditional use permit application. In case the permit is approved, the town set forth a list of stringent conditions for regulating the operation of the plant.

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The biggest reason to deny the CUP, the town's special counsel Richard Lehmann told the committee, is the small size of the proposed parcel.

"While the site is zoned industrial, the site is way too small to contain such a large and high-impact facility," Lehmann said. "It's like trying to put a 10-pound watermelon into a five-pound bag."

More than half of the 80 attendees at the public hearing wore hats and shirts with pro-ethanol logos. Many of those who spoke in favor of the plant hope it will improve the local grain market.

"We need an improvement in our corn and grain markets," Wayne Nelson of the town of Leeds said to the Planning and Zoning Committee. "Believe me, all the farmers will give you support to approve this."



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- Roger Brandner
- Dave Knapp
- Dennis Richards

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While some of those speaking against the plant said they are not against ethanol, but disapprove of the proposed plant's location and proximity to Cambria, others said the location is appropriate.

"As to the concern that the plant is too close to a school, my son goes to that school and I am not going to recommend anything detrimental to him," said Jeffrey Bump of the town of Scott. "I do not believe the expanded location will pose any problems."

Many disagreed with Bump, including town of Courtland resident and Columbia County Board Supervisor Sarah Lloyd.

"Cambria sits at the bottom of a valley," Lloyd said. "If the emissions drop 35 feet as they leave the plant, they'll be trapped in the bowl of Cambria."

According to Richmond, the CUP will be on the Oct. 3 Planning and Zoning Committee agenda. No further public testimony is scheduled to be heard.

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