

MINUTES

TOWN HALL MEETING
OF
JUNE 4, 2012
5:30 P.M.
MID COLUMBIA SENIOR CENTER
THE DALLES, OREGON

PRESIDING: Mayor Jim Wilcox

COUNCIL PRESENT: Bill Dick, Carolyn Wood, Dan Spatz, Tim McGlothlin

COUNCIL ABSENT: Brian Ahier

STAFF PRESENT: City Attorney Gene Parker, City Clerk Julie Krueger, Public Works Director Dave Anderson, Police Captain Ed Goodman, Community Development Director Dan Durow, Finance Director Kate Mast

CALL TO ORDER

Mayor Wilcox called the meeting to order at 5:30 p.m.

PRESENTATION REGARDING COAL TRAINS IN THE COLUMBIA RIVER GORGE

Andrew Johnson, Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railway (BNSF), provided a Power Point presentation, giving general information about BNSF facts and discussed the company's philosophy of protecting the environment and safety. He discussed proposed facility and equipment updates which would make for a better environment.

Mr. Johnson discussed coal export facilities, noting the Powder River Basin coal had been transported by rail for many years. He said there had been coal dust issues in the proximity of mine loading areas, but not along rail routes. Johnson said BNSF had required surfactant to be placed on the coal to eliminate dust from blowing from the cars.

Johnson reported there were currently between 28 and 35 trains on the Columbia Gorge route daily. He said it was the job of the railroad to work with customers to determine whether there was sufficient capacity to carry their loads.

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Johnson said there were several export proposals in various phases. He said there were many hurdles to go through an environmental review and asked that the permitting process be allowed to work without people asking to change the rules.

Brock Nelson, Union Pacific Railroad Public Affairs Officer (UPRR), provided a handout of his company's facts and heritage in the Pacific Northwest. He said he agreed with Mr. Johnson's comments regarding allowing the current permitting process to work, saying it was a very thorough process.

Greg Smith, representing the Morrow Pacific Project, introduced his associates, Brian Gard and Liz Fuller. Mr. Smith said the Morrow facility was proposed to be fully enclosed and the barges would also be covered during transport. It was noted an air quality permit was not even required for the project because it was completely enclosed.

Brian Gard said the project was designed to fit the Oregon philosophy of protecting the environment and would create many family wage jobs and property taxes to Morrow and Columbia County.

In response to a question from the audience, Mayor Wilcox said the information provided by BNSF, UPRR, and the Morrow Project would be added to the City's website for the public to review.

There was discussion regarding a map that had been submitted to the City regarding coal dust drift. Mr. Johnson said he didn't know where the map or data came from. Mr. Gard said the map had been prepared by Signline Research Institute. He said he didn't believe the information was accurate since the remedy of using surfactant to prevent dust emissions.

Don McDermott, Dallesport Community Council member asked how the surfactant was used. He said he had witnessed coal dust blowing off a train car and employees who worked at the Roosevelt landfill site had told him they had seen coal dust blowing. McDermott said it seemed like a better solution to cover the cars.

Mr. Smith said the surfactant was applied when the coal was loaded and it had been documented that it was an effective measure.

Chip Wood asked if a water quality permit was required for the Morrow facility. Greg Smith said the facility was fully contained and it would not be required. Chip Wood said he hoped the air and water quality would be monitored by the company.

Mr. Smith noted many nearby agricultural businesses were supportive of the project.

A question was asked about the composition of the surfactant. Mr. Gard said he did not know the composition but would find an answer.

Ken McBain asked if it was cost effective to transport with barges, compared to rail; the total capacity of the barges and how much barge traffic would increase.

Greg Smith said the total capacity was 8 million ton. He said it was expected there would be five barge trips per week, using four barges per trip. He said the trips per week could double when the facility was at full capacity.

An audience member expressed concern about the coal pollution from China coming back to the United States. Mr. Gard said we couldn't change China's use of coal, but the coal from the Powder River Basin was a cleaner product.

Tom Wood asked how many more trains would be going through the area. Mayor Wilcox said the railroads could not answer that question until they knew how many facilities were approved in the future.

There was a question asked regarding the long term sustainability of the coal facility. It was noted that contracts were in the process of being negotiated with Korea, Taiwan, and Japan and the first one was for a 25 year period.

Tom Sophie, Murdock, Washington, said he had seen coal trains in the Gorge on windy days and did smell and see dust blowing off the cars.

Bobbie Miller said she was pleased to hear the presentation and said the proposed facility would bring many jobs to the area.

Mike Furley said coal dust was known to cause illnesses in children. He said the Gorge was already polluted and he didn't want to see it get worse.

An audience member asked if there were plans to address traffic congestion at railroad crossings in the community. Mayor Wilcox said the City did have a study planned in the future to study the Webber Street area.

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ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 7:08 p.m.

Submitted by/
Julie Krueger, MMC
City Clerk

SIGNED:


James L. Wilcox, Mayor

ATTEST:


Julie Krueger, MMC, City Clerk