

More time for landfill comments

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Comments made at packed public hearing

CHESTERTOWN — The county commissioners heard enough from the public Tuesday night, on a proposed landfill to be built on the Alexander farm near Galena, to know that the public had more to say. They extended the deadline for written comments another week — until 10 a.m., Aug. 26.

Elizabeth Barbe, who owns a farm on Massey Road near the proposed landfill site, asked the commissioners to extend the comment period for three weeks from the original deadline of Aug. 19. She said she recently learned of the pro-

posal, and had spent the last four days researching. She told the commissioners that three more weeks were necessary “so people have time to research.”

Commission President Ron Fithian said the comment period would be extended to Friday, Aug. 26. Written comments will be accepted at the county commissioners’ office, 400 High St., Chestertown or by e-mail at kentcounty@kentgov.org.

Tuesday night’s public hearing drew a packed house of more than 100 people and lasted about two hours, which

included a 40-minute presentation by attorney Dan Saunders and geologist Terri Phillips representing the developer and 27 people who all spoke out against the project.

Toward the end of the meeting there was an animated exchange between Commissioners William Pickrum and Alex Rasin. Pickrum, who referenced the lure of economic benefits to the county as a “siren’s song,” repeated his

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missioners.”

That was after Rasin, who said he was “truly undecided,” noted that the county was “in debt over \$41 million.”

“Being \$41 million in debt is not important in this decision-making process,” said Pickrum.

“I think it’s very important in this deliberation,” Rasin fired back.

“It’s important in others, but not this one,” said Pickrum.

The purpose of the hearing was to discuss the proposed Development Rights and Responsibilities Agreement, between Kent Recycling and Land Reclamation LLC and Kent County, for a rubblefill project on about 405 acres between routes 301 and 299. Kent Recycling and Land Reclamation proposes to develop the site by continuing the sand and gravel extraction operation, and add a facility for recycling and landfill disposal of construction and demolition debris.

A DRRR is a contract that assures the developer that the project will be viable throughout, Saunders told the commissioners. It locks in local laws at the time of the agreement for the duration of the agreement — which in this case would be 40 years. State and federal laws that change are applicable to the project as they change. The developer still has to go through the permitting process on the local and state levels, which Saunders estimated would be three to four years.

Phillips narrated a 43-slide

PowerPoint presentation that touted what was portrayed as positive impacts of the project, including annual management fees paid to the county; the creation of 22 permanent full-time jobs once the facility is open; the hiring of a full-time county employee to oversee the facility; public outreach and education; taxes and other indirect revenue; and final end use of the property once it is closed.

Phillips said there would be a 100-foot vegetative buffer around all property lines and a 100-foot riparian buffer around all streams. The maximum height for each cell would be 75 feet. As part of the county oversight, the commissioners would appoint a citizens advisory board.

Before the floor was open to public comment, Fithian read into the record reports submitted by the county planning commission and Tourism and Economic Development Director Bernadette Van Pelt. Planners were bothered that the DRRR is incomplete and in draft form. VanPelt noted that the creation of 22 jobs, whether or not they are held by Kent County residents, would be significant. The salary and benefits package for the county employee who would oversee the facility is estimated to be \$75,000.

Everyone who offered public comment opposed the project. They expressed concern about the environmentally fragile Sassafras River ecosystem, increased traffic, decreased property values, and a general downgrade of a bucolic lifestyle.

“I object to having this dumped in my drinking water,” said adja-

cent property owner Anthony “Butch” Johnson. “Why ruin our beautiful perfect county with someone else’s trash. They call it rubble; I call it trash.”

Another Massey Road neighbor, Robert Dann, who is Johnson’s son-in-law, asked the commissioners “to do some soul searching because you’re getting ready to sell us down the river.”

Ellyn Vail noted that most of the rubble hauled into Kent would be from Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Delaware and New York, without doing much to help Maryland reach its goal for recycling. She asked the commissioners to come up with a “better, different way to reduce our trash rather than 75-foot-high mountains of trash.”

Adding to the chorus of opposition were Sassafras Riverkeeper Jamie Brunkow, former First District congressman and environmental steward Wayne Gilchrest, and 36th District Delegate Mike Smigiel.

At the conclusion of the public hearing the commissioners went into closed session, from 8:43 to 9:37 p.m. They met with attorneys and consultants to discuss the KRLR proposal. The reasons for closing the meeting were “attorney-client privilege; and protection of the county’s and citizen interest in [the] negotiation process.”

Attending the closed session were: VanPelt; Planning Director Gail Owings; County Attorney Tom Yeager; Director of Public Works Wayne Morris; Marty Holden, division chief at Public Works; attorney and engineer Roger Truitt, who has extensive experience with landfill issues; and engineer Larry Hosmer.