



LOCKPORT SINCE 1821 Union-Sun & Journal

DEVELOPMENT: AES answers pier project questions

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— By Bill Wolcott

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Dan and Elizabeth Hogan, who once lived in the center of the land where AES Somerset generates electricity in the Town of Somerset, think the Lake Unloading Project is an excellent idea.

“I don’t see anything wrong with it at this point,” said Dan Hogan who served on the Barker Board of Education for 15 years. “A lot of people are saying there’s something wrong with it. I don’t know. They’re talking about noise and foreign coal coming in here.”

The Hogans were among Somerset residents who received an invitation to the first public information meeting Wednesday at the Lockport Holiday Inn.

Jon Reimann, the AES project representative, sought to answer those questions. “Most of the comments I received were positive,” he said. “People want to know, when can we start construction.”

Work will begin in 2009 and there is a 12-to-18 month construction window. The coal will come from the mines it always came from, according to Reimann. “Our coal is going to be U.S.A.-based products.” The coal comes from Montana, Wyoming, Illinois and Appalachia area. Currently, it is unloaded in Buffalo before being hauled by train to Somerset. When the \$25 million project is completed, most of the coal will be shipped through the Welland Canal on freighters.

AES plans to put a 3,200-foot pier into Lake Ontario with a 17-foot wide conveyor to carry coal to the plant.

Somerset Supervisor Richard Meyers thinks there will be less noise than with the trains.

“One of the issues is with trains idling at 2 a.m. Anything to cut that down will be beneficial to the town.”

AES said it will be a new source of tax revenue for the county, the Town of Somerset and the Barker Central school system.

Also, AES Somerset has been assured that the town will be able to use the conveyor and Meyers said that salt may be brought in by boats. A ship load might be too much for Somerset, but other towns may also benefit. Now, salt is shipped by trucks.

There are several more meetings and approvals to come. Reimann estimated there will be 100 additional trade workers and the project will help AES retain 150 people in that generation station.

Pile drivers will be among the first to start and members of the Cheektowaga-based company were on hand. “We’ll push to get it done in the summer,” said Buck Darling. “I can’t imagine doing it in the lake in the fall.”

AES will still require the same amount of coal, but fewer railroad hauls will be necessary. AES expects one or two boat shipments a week and about 80 deliveries a year.

“It’s a good first step having a public information meeting like this,” said state Senator George Maziarz (R-Newfane). “I think this is a good project. We don’t have many companies who are knocking down our door to invest \$25 million. It means stabilization of jobs that are already here. It means additional jobs.”

Vince Muto of the Town of Lockport has worked for AES since 1985. “Its reliability and hopefully I’ll keep my job,” he said.

Marsha Koerner of Somerset said, “I’m very interested in it. I’m excited about it. Anything we can do to retain jobs and keep the environment safe at the same time I’m for it.”

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