

Power plant approval one step closer

By David Anderson - Associate Editor

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A proposal to build a 275-megawatt coal-fueled power plant near Sigurd took a step forward Jan. 23, as the Sevier County Planning Commission voted to give final approval for a conditional use permit.

The vote came after nearly 45 minutes of discussion, which included adding three more conditions for the power plant developers to follow.

“My concern is the ash,” said John Worley, planning commission member. He said that fugitive dust from ash dumping on the power plant site, possible cleanup in the future and the unsightliness of it made it a key concern in his mind. He asked that a condition be added that the ash be disposed of off-site.

“I want more than a promise,” Worley said.

He said this means that the power plant developers will have to find an alternate place to store ash that will need approval from the county prior to beginning construction of the plant.

The commission voted to approve the condition.

Commission member Caryl Christensen asked that a condition be added that monitors be required to keep track of stray voltage at the developer's expense. She said this would help protect agricultural interests in the area. That condition was approved.

Christensen also asked for a condition that the ash be moved out of the county.

“There are places in the state that accept this kind of material,” Christensen said.

“I don't believe in moving our trash to somewhere else,” said Evelyn Nielsen, planning commission member. The motion to add the condition that the ash be shipped out of county was defeated in a 4-3 vote, with Christensen, Worley and Kelly Alvey voting in favor. Nielsen, Doug Gadd, Kent Parsons and Newell Hales voted against it.

The final condition was proposed by Alvey, who asked that the particulate matter emission standards be set lower than what is required by the Utah Division of Air Quality. This proposal was also accepted by the planning commission.

In the final vote, Hales, Gadd, Worley, Parsons and Nielsen voted in favor of the conditional use permit, while Christensen and Alvey voted against it. The proposal is now slated to be passed to the Sevier County Commission.

The power plant was a topic of discussion at a Sevier County Commission meeting Jan. 22.

In that meeting James Kennon, one of the leaders of an effort that opposes the power plant, asked the county commission if it would consider changing the way that it handles public hearings.

Kennon asked that instead of limiting each person to two minutes, that a longer period of time be allotted so that people could have time to illustrate their points and present evidence.

“For any intelligent dialogue, it takes time,” Kennon said. He also asked for some kind of response or acknowledgment of written comments that are submitted. Kennon also said in the interest of keeping the hearing from becoming way too long, that his group would work to keep repetition of various points to a minimum between presenters.

“We appreciate that ... this helps,” said Gary Mason, county commissioner. “The next few months is going to be a challenge for all of us.” He said the commissioners have not discussed how the public hearing will be hosted, but that they will keep in mind Kennon's suggestions.

County Attorney Dale Eyre said that he took exception to Kennon's assertion that the power plant is being treated differently than other proposals.

“These commissioners are doing a good job and the planning commission is doing a good job,” Eyre said.

Sigurd Mayor Chad Houchin also addressed the commission, and presented them with a resolution Sigurd's town council passed that stated opposition to the power plant proposal.

Houchin also presented the results of a survey taken by the town council. Of 150 total surveys that were delivered to residences in Sigurd, 105 were returned. Of those returned, 94 indicated opposition to the plant, while 11 indicated they were in favor of it.