

Tona council eyes impact of contaminated sites on city

By Chris Baines
Correspondent

The Tonawanda Common Council will study the potential impact on the city of several contaminated sites nearby in the Town of Tonawanda, including the nearly operational BFI cogeneration plant, before issuing a firm public statement on the matter.

At the council's meeting Tuesday evening, city officials stressed that complicated issues are involved, and consequently more information is needed to enable the council to respond productively. To that end, Richard Tobe, commissioner of the Erie County Department of Environment and Planning, will be invited to impart his expertise to the council. Public will be notified of the date of his visit.

In response to the concerns of some citizens that dangerous levels of radon will be emitted as a by-

product when the BFI facility becomes operational, Alderman Kevin Hardwick sponsored a measure that would have put the council on record calling for the U.S. Department of Energy to apply the full environmental Impact statement process to those sites. The measure died when Hardwick received no second, but it could surface again, possibly in modified form, for approval after further study.

Several council members found the measure confusing and said they could not support it without additional information.

Mayor Alice Roth stressed that after 50 years, there is finally movement toward implementing a cleanup of the area, which includes radioactive waste from the Manhattan Project, and that she didn't want to take any action that would stall the effort.

Aldерwoman Gayle Syposs said she and Alderman Kenneth Horn are "extremely concerned" because their

district is the closest part of the city to the sites. She said Tobe should "be called in to educate us further so we can take appropriate steps to protect our community."

Aldерwoman Lynette Ryan stressed that the council should move carefully and not shoot from the hip.

The mayor explained that the issue of potentially dangerous levels of radon emissions from the BFI facility is a separate matter from concerns relating to the Manhattan Project. She said the radon problem would be caused by the cogeneration plant's process of extracting methane from the ground.

Dorothy Watson, 771 Fletcher St, said she is concerned that radioactive waste is below the Niagara Landfill where the BFI facility is located. She said more than 75 percent of the city's children attend schools within a mile of the cogeneration plant, and

would be exposed to radon emissions each day.

"It's time our elected officials start thinking of the citizens of the city," she said, adding that she fears another Love Canal in Tonawanda.

Assistant City Engineer Jason Zdrojewski said he has been in contact with the state Department of Environmental Conservation, which will issue its report on emissions testing at the BFI site in a few weeks to a month.

The report will indicate anticipated levels of methane and radon emissions and whether they are within or exceed state guidelines, before the BFI facility is operational, which should be in two to three months, he said.

Jim Strong, 35 Douglas St., who initially raised the radon issue several weeks ago, said the objective is not only "clean air, but cleaner air." He suggested that radon has a half-lifespan of four days in the atmosphere.