

Greybull's ethanol plant coming to a 'Successful conclusion'

By Lee Lockhart, *Publisher, Northern Wyoming Daily News Worland*

GREYBULL — The dream of building an ethanol plant in Greybull is now 100 days from “coming to a successful conclusion,” with a public signing of a contract between Big Horn Basin Ethanol (BHBE) and Bronte Renewable of Canada.

Tuesday evening in the town council chambers, BHBE president Tom Johnson signed the document that will transfer ownership of the plant to Bronte. The agreement, according to Johnson, allows BHBE to lease and operate the facility, if a series of benchmarks and objectives are met.

But the ceremonial signing was not without objection from a group of individuals who charged the town's leadership with excluding public input about the project.

Johnson said the plant would produce 25 million gallons of ethanol per year, and contribute nearly \$60 million to the community.

He said that he is not an economist, but economists have told him that \$60 million dollars produced in a community will turnover roughly seven times and that means the plant would approach one-half billion dollars in economic impact for the area.

Bronte Renewable, Johnson explained, would be the builder and the owner of the facility, while BHBE would act as the operator through a lease agreement with Bronte.

The document, executed by Johnson, secures the \$45 million projected as the necessary capital to construct the plant. During the next 100 days a general contractor for the plant will have to come on board, Johnson said after the meeting. During that same period “100 percent of the ethanol will also be pre-sold,” Johnson said.

Marvin Hunt and a group of others asked when the public would have a chance to voice its concern about or support for the project.

“You have not allowed for any public input,” Hunt said to Johnson and Greybull Mayor Frank Houk.

The mayor responded that there have been public hearings and those hearings had been advertised and the public was invited.

Hunt countered that the hearings only dealt with the renewal of the old (Standard Oil, now BP) refinery land.

He directly challenged Houk when he said, “The mayor and I run in different circles. While his friends may tell him they support the project, my circle says ‘no.’ This location is too close to residential housing. It's not a quarter-mile from residential homes.”

Another objector said the town conducted public meetings on a city park and the cutting down of trees, “and yet there were no meetings on this plant.” She went on to say, “We haven't talked about something as huge as this ethanol plant.”

Analyt Reader said it was ironic that the town would outlaw burning of leaves in the fall, “but will accept this plant.” She went on to note the temperature inversions that befall the community in winter and asked, “where will the spew (from the ethanol plant) go?”

Johnson reassured the audience that Bronte and BHBE will comply with the letter of the law and work to secure all of the necessary permits from the state. “If we can't meet those requirements, we can't operate.”

He stressed that the laws governing the plant's emissions are the same, regardless of whether coal or natural gas is used as its fuel.

“We will go through the process as diligently as we can make it,” Johnson said.

Former Greybull mayor Ron Wright called the possibility of establishing an ethanol plant in Greybull “the single most important event in Greybull’s history. For the first time in a long time in our history something positive is happening.”

Johnson said the ethanol project that has been studied and worked on for more than two years will now have “the financial wherewithal to come to a positive conclusion.”

“We will meet all the state standards. We know we can’t make everybody happy, so I offer my apologies in advance,” Johnson said.

As the meeting came to an end, Mayor Houk said he would work to arrange a public meeting about the proposed plant for the community “early in January.”