

BUCKS COUNTY Courier Times

Opinion

Editorial: Elcon falls to unified opposition from stakeholders

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We're thrilled that the Falls Township Board of Supervisors voted this week to reject Elcon Recycling Services' plan to build a hazardous waste treatment facility in the township's sprawling Keystone Industrial Port Complex.

Thunderous applause from residents and environmental groups from Pennsylvania and New Jersey punctuated the vote, which was held at Pennsbury High School. It followed two hours of public comment during which not one speaker on either side of the river voiced support for the project, which Elcon has been pursuing for about five years.

The facility would treat up to 210,000 tons of hazardous and pharmaceutical waste per year. Critics of the plans liken what Elcon was proposing to an incinerator and voiced concerns that a malfunction or spill could spew harmful pollutants into the air or the nearby Delaware River, which provides drinking water for millions of people.

Falls also already has one of the largest collection of hazardous facilities of any municipality in the Philadelphia metropolitan area and we have seen health data showing elevated prevalence of asthma, COPD and lung cancer in the area.

In addition to those big-picture health concerns, the township's planning commission, supervisors and fire marshal submitted a number of more-granular objections to the plan revolving around emergency access for vehicles, fire lanes, exit routes for workers in the event of an emergency, spill containment measures, floodplain issues and other points of contention.

While the Department of Environmental Protection is still reviewing Elcon's application, the people of Bucks County and Burlington County seem to have spoken loudly, clearly and, at least on Tuesday night, unanimously. They do not want Elcon here. Neither do we.

If all of that makes Tuesday night's vote seem like a no-brainer for the supervisors, consider that the township is almost certain to face litigation as a result of it and officials knew that going in and rejected the proposal anyway.

The Delaware Riverkeeper Network celebrated the vote with a pair of tweets calling the news "wonderful" and "superb" before quickly shifting tones to remind its followers that Elcon will continue to hang over the local community because of the DEP's pending decision and the likelihood of litigation against Falls. The Riverkeepers even added that they're planning to hire an attorney specializing in industrial wastes sites in anticipation of a legal battle.

The few statements Elcon attorneys have made in the last month or two seem show why the Delaware Riverkeeper Network is looking to lawyer up.

Before the Falls Township Planning Commission voted 4-0 on March 26 to recommend that the supervisors deny the plan, a lawyer representing Elcon told the commission it was not seeking a vote on that night and suggested that it could have legal consequences. Instead, Kim Freimuth of Fox Rothschild asked to no avail for the meeting to be continued to a later date as it worked to address concerns.

On Tuesday night, Freimuth told the supervisors that Elcon would be "happy" to go back to the drawing board and come up with something more palatable to the township. She also suggested that the applicant had received 11th-hour correspondence from the township it did not have enough time to address.

That the supervisors were unmoved is fine with us. They have every right to call the vote, and we believe they represented the residents who elected them well on Tuesday.

Bordentown City Mayor John Brodowski took the words right out of our mouths when he implored Elcon officials to respect the board's decision and let the matter drop. But we'll be surprised if Elcon does.