

Foes of recycling plant get their say at two hearings

By John Tuohy 4:30 p.m. EDT July 23, 2014



(Photo: Charlie Nye/The Star)

Opponents of a recycling deal signed by Mayor Greg Ballard asserted at back-to-back public hearings this week that the proposed plant is an inefficient way to re-use waste.

The foes included environmentalists and businesses that use recycled goods and who said the plant, to be built by Covanta Indianapolis, will produce "contaminated" recyclables and discourage curbside recycling, which is cleaner.

The mayor, however, has said the new plant will instantly and dramatically increase recycling across Indianapolis

More than 50 opponents gathered at each of two meetings — the first Tuesday night before the City-County Council Community Affairs Committee and the second Wednesday afternoon in front of the city's Board of Public Works

"We know what works and what doesn't," said Fran McPoland, an adviser for paper recyclers, who said that paper re-use has doubled in 24 years. "Paper can be recycled over and over but it must be free of contaminants to produce quality materials."

Covanta wants to build \$45 million recycling plant on South Harding Street that will accept most waste in one giant pile and separate it by recycling type via machinest. Officials with the company say modern waste sensors make the sorting more efficient than been, and that opponents' complaints are exaggerated.

Covanta collects all the city's garbage now but burns it at an incinerator on South Harding. Ballard said the new plant means everyone's garbage will now be recycled. The only items presently recycled are those that residents sort by themselves and leave on the curb or take to recycling bins themselves.

Carey Hamilton, executive director of the Indiana Recycling Coalition, said the new "single-source" recycling will discourage to the point of extinction the curbside program, which produces cleaner recyclables. She encouraged the city to upgrade curbside, instead.

"This is a sub par system that has not been fully considered," Hamilton said.

But Jeremiah Shirk, the Department of Public Works chief of staff, said the new plant instantly will increase resident participation in recycling from less than 10 percent to 100 percent.

"Even if we increased curbside by 5 percent a year until 2028 we would miss out on recycling 100 million tons," he said.

Ballard signed a 10-year extension of a waste disposal contract with Covanta that would last to 2028 and include the new plant, which would be privately funded.

Before the deal can be finalized, it must be acted on by the Board of Public Works. The board has scheduled an Aug. 6 meeting to vote on the proposal.

Call Star reporter John Tuohy at (317) 444-6418 and follow on Twitter @john_tuohy.

Read or Share this story: <http://indy.st/1mFt9lx>