

FarmTech: Port “should not become a sleepy marina”

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FarmTech Energy Corporation wants to build an ethanol plant on the industrial port lands of Oshawa’s harbour. They recently withdrew an application from the Ministry of the Environment, but are working towards a more detailed application for resubmission.

The company hoping to build an ethanol plant on the industrial port lands of Oshawa’s harbour has withdrawn their application for an air emissions approval from the Ontario Ministry of the Environment (MOE). But FarmTech Energy Corporation is not backing out of Oshawa. Citing the reasoning behind the withdrawal of their application for approval to “discharge into the natural environment other than water” was to address “all of the deficiencies related to the original application” on the MOE’s Environmental Bill of Rights Registry. But Bernie Morton, vice president of Sussex Strategy Group, says it is because the MOE requested FarmTech complete a Cumulative Effect Study. “It was a study we weren’t required to do, but they asked us to,” he says, adding it is uncommon for the MOE to request this study. “We felt it would be better to withdraw the previous application and submit it again when it’s completed in a nice, neat, clean package.”

FarmTech will resubmit the application for certificate of approval in a week or two, says Morton. They are currently completing the new application with the Cumulative Effect Study information included. “There are a lot of engineers involved in the project who each have their responsibilities to fill out the form, so it takes time,” Morton adds. “We’ve now completed everything the ministry has asked us to do.” But some local environmental groups are not convinced. “Given the risk of adverse impacts from the proposed facility upon Second Marsh, we are pleased that the company has withdrawn its application for a certificate of approval,” says Brian Brasier, executive director of Friends of Second Marsh. “We are especially concerned about the emission of odour, noise, particulate matter, combustion products, and volatile organic compounds from the proposed facility.”

If built, the ethanol facility would be located directly beside the Second Marsh as the port makes sense both economically and environmentally, says FarmTech’s website. The original application was submitted to the MOE in August 2008 and was withdrawn on Sept. 4, 2009 states the MOE Environmental Bill of Rights Registry. Members of the public were

invited to submit comments for 30- days after an application is submitted and the MOE received 103 comments for FarmTech's first application. Once the second application is submitted, the public will have 30 days to comment on the project says Morton. "We are happy with that because it gives the public an opportunity to view it," explains the vice president. "We know there will be people who are opposed to it." But he also says many farmers and other sponsors are even more eager to get the facility, which would convert corn and other crops into gasoline, if built. "We've spent hundreds and hundreds, even thousands and thousands, to get all this information together," Morton says. "It's a big, big project." Morton also says that despite some thoughts of residents, FarmTech is not backing away from this Oshawa project. "Does it mean we are going away?"

No. In fact it's actually the opposite," he states. "It (the Oshawa port) shouldn't become a sleepy marina." But Brasier feels the port is not the correct location for an ethanol facility like this one. "We will remain vigilant, and will again carefully scrutinize any further applications filed by FarmTech," says Brasier. "It is our overall position that this is an environmentally unsuitable location for the proposed industrial complex." If the project receives the certificate of approval from the MOE, construction could begin right away according to Morton.

"The project is shovel ready," he says. "It will create over 300 construction jobs and 50 full-time jobs in the plant. It will also create many more indirect and spin-off jobs for farmers and truck drivers." The jobs are what has City Councillor Robert Lutczyk pushing it forward. The city has been stalling on FarmTech's application to have the land re-zoned to suit an ethanol plant for more than a year, he says. "It's a scam, not the ethanol plant, but how the city is treating companies...they're road blocking them," he continues.

"The city has been stonewalling them under the direction of the mayor since the beginning." The city had 180 days to come to a decision on the re-zoning application. "It's stuck in the planning department," says Councillor Lutczyk of the application. "All they (council) want is the yacht club and I think industry and the yacht club can work together." The city says some missing information is needed before a decision can be made. When the air emissions application was submitted to the MOE last year the cost of the project was estimated at \$185 million – it is now at \$220 million states Morton. The plant would produce 210 million litres of ethanol annually making it one of the largest facilities of its kind in the country. If approved by the MOE, construction on the project would take between 12 and 18 months, says Morton.

"A lot depends on when we're able to get started," he says, adding it would be no less than a year to complete. The public will be able to submit their comments to the MOE once FarmTech submits its new application.