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Woodbine receives grant to clean up landfill, could pave way for biofuel production facility

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By BEN LEACH Staff Writer | Posted: Thursday, August 26, 2010

WOODBINE - New technology that could be used to extract fuel from algae may find a home in the borough after it received a grant to clean up a landfill site that would serve as home to the plant.

Woodbine received a \$98,000 grant Thursday from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Rural Development division to clean up the site on Fidler Hill Road and explore its use as a home for a biofuel production plant.

"This will help create jobs and have the ultimate goal of improving peoples' lives," said Howard Henderson, New Jersey's director of rural development for the USDA.

The grant allows the borough to determine whether the land can be cleaned up and used as a suitable spot for people to work.

Garden State Ethanol is in talks to build a multimillion-dollar biofuel production facility at the landfill. The company gave a presentation Thursday in the borough to explain the kind of work it would be doing at the site.

The landfill is fenced off to prevent it from being used by riders of all-terrain vehicles and dirt bikes, and to discourage residents from dumping any more waste at the site.

The hope is that the site could host some kind of alternative energy project.

"It's funny how just a few years ago, people thought that nothing could be done with these landfills," Henderson said.

Andrew Greene, president of Garden State Ethanol, said it is important to prevent any more contamination at the site. The company needs to know the level of groundwater contamination and whether it has leached further into the ground, potentially contaminating groundwater for residents, he said.

"We know that there is contamination (at the landfill site)," Greene said. "How far does that contamination extend into the groundwater table? Nobody knows the answer to that question."

Green and his company see the potential in the site and on Thursday showcased the kind of technology they would use if the site were approved for a biofuel production facility. Residents and borough officials were invited to the former Gentilini Ford building at Washington Avenue and Tyler Road for the presentation.

The building - now dubbed the Garden State Ethanol Prototype Center - is home to six bioreactors, the first of three major technology components that Greene said are necessary to get a biofuel facility up and running.

The 500-gallon bioreactors work the same way that larger, production-scale reactors would work. At the top of the vat is a series of LEDs that use a specific wavelength of light. The algae use the light, along with nutrients and carbon dioxide, to grow, reproduce and store energy. Through a continuous cycle, the lighter, newer algae remains at the top, while the heavier, older algae that has stored more energy falls to the bottom.

The water that hosts the algae would hopefully be taken from wastewater from the borough. Wastewater makes more sense because the algae could use the excess nitrogen, Greene said.

The second piece of technology would remove as much of the older algae as possible. The third component would extract the oil from that algae.

The prototype facility is a way for Garden State Ethanol to test which methods work best. The company is working with Rowan University to study species of algae and find one that fits the project, and a Minnesota-based company called Algaedyne has provided the technology.

If the site gets approved and Garden State Ethanol moves forward, Green said the company could produce 25 million gallons of ethanol and 10 million gallons of biodiesel annually.

Woodbine resident John Fisher, 48, who attended Thursday's demonstration, said it is too early in the project for him to say whether or not he is in favor of it. However, capping the landfill and finding another use for the site that does not create hazardous waste is something that he favors.

"It's important that we get a cap on that landfill one way or another," he said.

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