

Energy park support grows

By LINDA GITTLEMAN
Gratiot Managing Editor

Support for Alma's Great Lakes Energy Park is growing in the state legislature, but it won't be entirely smooth sailing.

The state's utility companies and environmentalists taking a second and more positive look at nuclear power are formidable foes.

But state legislators for the most part see the advantages of the park and one of the most attractive to some, plainly, is money, said state Rep. Paul Opsommer, R-DeWitt.

Badly needed jobs in a wounded economy, more needed power, retrieval of oil still left in the state as well as the environmentally sound technology of car-

bon dioxide capture are all a plus. But the money that can be raked in from taxes has decidedly made an impact.

Other legislators find the oil retrieval process, using that captured carbon dioxide, an especially enticing factor, he said.

But the state still has some old business to take care of. PA 141 is up for renewal. That piece of legislation opened up utility competition in the state. Unsurprisingly, the utility companies would like the law to be repealed and will likely present their case in full force, citing the reliability of their energy and the investments in the state's energy that they've made through the years.

"They'd like to go back to having a monopoly, but that's not going to

happen," Opsommer said. So many businesses, residents and schools are choosing their energy source and are likely unwilling to change.

"Most representatives favor competition," he said.

The utility companies are also looking at building another nuclear plant in the southern part of the state. To get one up and running means a long, tedious process with lots of permitting hoops and an enormous amount of requirements. It would take at least eight years.

And while there may indeed be room for both an integrated gas combined cycle coal plant that's planned for Alma, and a nuclear power plant, some environmentalists are reluctantly rethinking nuclear power.

(See Park, Page 2A)

Park

Morning Sun
7-27-07

(Continued from Page 1A)

Mindful of the propensity for human error and the grave results of that error, one environmental organization is nevertheless favoring nuclear power over any coal plants. They don't favor it much, though.

Opsommer said, however, some environmentalists do in fact prefer ICGGs. And even of the ones that don't, they believe that if there has to be a coal plant, the only acceptable one is an ICGG and not the more traditional plants that are still being planned.

While Opsommer is working on other related energy bills, he's also introducing a bill that would create a Renaissance Zone for ethanol plants and IGCC plants in order to provide tax breaks.

The chances of it passing, he said, "are pretty good."

He noted that the energy park also has a great deal of support in the state Senate, and particularly in the Senate Energy Committee.

On the federal front, ener-

gy park developer Mike Sawruk and his partner Michael Muckleroy are making headway.

Last year, Sawruk applied for federal tax credits and lost. But this year is a new year and some tax credits still remain to be awarded. U.S. Senator Debbie Stabenow's press secretary Brad Carroll said she had voted for an extension of tax credits that could help support the project.

"The broader energy tax package passed the finance committee with bipartisan support, but unfortunately did not receive an up or down vote on the floor due to being blocked by Senate Republicans," he said in an e-mail.

"Senator Stabenow is currently working with her colleagues to ensure this important legislation receives the full vote in the Senate that it deserves," he continued.

Carroll also included letters written earlier this month to Henry Paulson, the Treasury Secretary and Sam-

uel Bodman, the Energy Secretary, signed by both Sen. Carl Levin and Stabenow.

The letters expressed their "strong support" for the energy park's tax credit application.

"This project is unique in that it combines into one integrated facility all the major elements of the alternative energy development emphasized in the Energy Policy Act. The project would utilize advanced renewable energy, clean coal, carbon sequestration, refining, ethanol and enhanced oil recovery technologies.

"The Great Lakes Energy Park gasification power plant will be the first project to leverage America's coal resources to produce a secure, clean electricity supply, permanently sequester greenhouse gases and recover and process more of America's oil resources."

The letters concluded that the energy park is "uniquely qualified" for the coal project tax credits.