

Barkeyville residents don't want plant

By LEIGH PROTIVNAK
Staff writer

Nearly 100 concerned Barkeyville residents have banded together to try to stop an asphalt plant from moving into their neighborhood.

The group petitioned the Department of Environmental Protection to extend the public comment period for the approval of a plan to allow Glenn O. Hawbaker Inc. of State College to build a

450-ton hot mix asphalt plant on a 25-acre lot in the Barkeyville Industrial Park. Comments are now being accepted until March 23.

Hawbaker announced intentions to build the \$4.5 million facility in January. At the time, production was expected to begin in April.

If the plant is constructed, it will fill the Venango County-owned Barkeyville Industrial Park located along Stevenson Road in Barkeyville Borough. The plant is

expected to bring between 60 and 80 new jobs to the Barkeyville area.

An advertisement placed by the DEP in the newspaper said the building plan limits the plant to 560,000 tons of asphalt per year and would combust natural gas, fuel oils, reprocessed oils, biodiesel, coal or any combination of the fuels. The plant would emit 8.96 tons of volatile organic compounds, 28 tons of nitrogen oxides and 37.8 tons of carbon monoxide per year.

If the plan is approved, the DEP will issue an air quality permit for the plant and maintain records and operating restrictions designed to keep the facility operating within all applicable air quality requirements.

The ad continues to say that because the technology is new, coal will be allowed to be burned at the facility until a stack test is completed. The test would be finished within 180 days of the plant start-up.

But Mark DeWalt, a longtime Barkeyville resident and member of the opposition group, believes 180 days is too long to allow hazardous gases and chemicals into the air.

"It's going to set the precedent for the type of industry and atmosphere here. I think it's a poor choice and out of character with what (the zoning ordinance) intended," DeWalt said.

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In addition to the air quality permit, the group has challenged the borough zoning appeal board to overturn the zoning permit granted to Hawbaker, saying the plant doesn't conform to borough zoning regulations.

DeWalt said the borough zoning ordinance was revamped in 1999 to allow for the industrial park, but residents were assured an industrial zoning designation did not mean the industry in the area would be heavy.

The zoning ordinance forbids emission of "noxious, toxic or corrosive fumes or gases or offensive odors." It also says "no pollution of air by fly ash, dust, vapors or other substances shall be permitted which is harmful to health or to animals, vegetation or other property."

Barkeyville zoning officer Gary T. Dovey, who granted Hawbaker a zoning permit in December, has resigned. But Dovey

reviewed the permit before he stepped down and still believed it was consistent with the zoning ordinance.

Calls to a borough zoning hearing board member on whether an appeal hearing had been set were not returned Friday.

In a letter to the editor of the newspaper, Stevenson Road resident Susie Martin expressed the group's environmental concerns:

"The DEP says asphalt fumes are known toxins; exposure to these toxins may cause cancer, central nervous system problems, liver damage, respiratory problems and skin irritations. There's also potential water pollution and a decrease in property values.

"We'll also have an even greater increase in truck traffic. In order to transport 560,000 ton of asphalt we can anticipate 28 trucks an hour or 1 truck every 2.1 minutes to and from the asphalt plant."

If the permit is issued, DeWalt said the group wants to make sure the plant is held to "the highest possible environmental standards

that apply."

The group has created a Web site, www.protectbarkeyville.org, with all the details of their arguments, including environmental information and borough zoning documents.

The DEP will hold a public input hearing at 7 p.m. Thursday in the Barkeyville Borough hall, and will accept written comments until March 23. Written correspondence should be sent to John Guth, Regional Air Quality Manager, Department of Environmental Protection, Northwest Regional Office, 230 Chestnut St., Meadville, 16335.

Anyone interested in presenting testimony during the public session should contact George Monasky at 814-332-6636 to be placed on the meeting agenda. Speakers will be given five minutes each.

Opposition group members also plan to attend the regular borough council meeting at 7 p.m. Tuesday in the borough hall to address zoning and traffic concerns.