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Updated: Homer rejects water sale to coal mine

Mon, 02/11/2013 - 8:32pm | [Tracy Moss](#) ^[1]

HOMER — The Homer Village Board voted Monday night to reject an agreement for treated water and sewer services for Sunrise Coal LLC's proposed Bulldog coal mine, surprising even those in the audience who had asked the board to do so.

Traci Barkley with Prairie Rivers Network said she was shocked by the vote.

"This is huge," said Barkley, whose nonprofit organization has been working with some Homer-area residents against the proposed coal mine and Homer's proposed agreement to supply it with up to 20,000 gallons a day of treated water and sewer services.

The mood was celebratory outside the village meeting room immediately after the vote in which three of the six board members present voted no, making it impossible for the proposal to get the four "yes" votes required to pass.

Board member Guy James was absent, but he had voted "no" last month in a straw poll on the proposed contract. The straw poll had come to a 3-3 tie among the six village board members, and Mayor David Lucas voted yes to break the tie.

But on Tuesday night, one board member, Mike Johnson, changed his vote to a "no."

The other two who voted no, Roy Woodmansee and Kevin Knott, had also voted that way in the straw poll. The two who voted yes Tuesday night were Ray Cunningham and Larry Minge. The mayor did not cast a vote because three of the six had already voted no, so his vote didn't matter at that point.

After the vote, Lucas asked Johnson whether he had problems with something in the proposed contract or was voting no for other reasons.



^[2]

Photo by: Rick Danzl/The News-Gazette

Traci Barkley, Champaign, (from Prairie Rivers Network) hugs in the lobby at the Homer Village Hall on Monday Feb. 11, 2013 after a contract to supply water for a proposed coal mine was voted down.

Image



Image



^[4]

Johnson said it was not an issue with the contract itself and didn't elaborate further.

Lucas then told the two Sunrise officials and their attorney that he didn't believe they could go any further at that point and told them the village would have to see if anything could be done to get the contract presented again.

The meeting was then adjourned for 5 minutes, and the Sunrise officials left, declining to comment. Sunrise has absorbed all the village's costs of the negotiations, which have amounted to more than \$50,000 in legal fees, including a special municipal attorney hired by the village.

Barkley said she believes the village board members were voting their conscience Monday night.

"It might be the end of Sunrise Coal in this community," she said. "This is not the future for the community. Ag and small business is. Coal is not."

Early on in the discussions in fall of last year, a Sunrise official told the village board that the coal mine would be built regardless of what happens with Homer, and Sunrise has other alternatives for water, but working with Homer was its preferred choice. Sunrise has not disclosed any alternative plans for accessing treated and raw water.

The agreement voted down Monday night was for treated water and sewer services only. Sunrise has also asked Homer to consider supplying the proposed coal mine with up to 540,000 gallons a day of raw water, but the village had not officially decided whether to move forward with that request, working on the treated water and sewer agreement first.

After the meeting, Lucas said he was surprised by the vote. He said he had recently talked to Johnson, who gave no indication he planned to change his vote. Lucas said he will talk to Johnson about his reason for voting no and see if there's something in the contract that can be rectified to his approval.

But, Lucas said, it's a dead deal if Johnson changed his vote for philosophical reasons.

#1 ^[6]

Sid Saltfork ^[7] wrote 5 hours 4 min ago

Every once in a while someone votes with their conscience. Whether you agree with Mike Johnson, or not; you have to respect him for his decision. He must have been, and evidently still is under a lot of pressure. Evidently, David Lucas has a deep interest in getting the mine in the area. Pressuring Mike Johnson after the public vote will be the wrong way to go. The man made his decision on what he feels is best for his community. Best to respect him, shake hands, and let it go.

Glad to see that Big Business doesn't win them all. Good luck Homer.

#2 ^[8]

yates ^[9] wrote 2 hours 54 min ago

Seems to be more anti-domestic energy then anything else. Obama would be proud. Bet that coal mine would create more jobs then all that small business flocking to Homer these days.

#3 ^[10]

Sid Saltfork ^[7] wrote 2 hours 31 min ago

It was Homer's decision; not yours, or mine. They are the ones who live there. They are the ones to decide what they want, or do not want. It's called Democracy.

#4 ^[11]

SaintClarence27 ^[12] wrote 6 min 5 sec ago

Why would Obama be proud?

#5 ^[13]

raptureready ^[14] wrote 1 hour 40 min ago

Mr. Lucas' reluctance to accept the board's decision makes me question his motives. The vote is in, it didn't go his way so why is he now trying to go around and change board members votes? Has the notorious Illinois political corruption reached this small town too? Is there something personal in this for someone? Is he also going to try to push through another vote before the full board is there? One of the men that has voted NO in the past happens to be on vacation. If Mayor Lucas does happen to weasel in a second bite at the apple in order to try yet again to get his way no matter what the people of Homer want, then perhaps he should wait until the ENTIRE board is available. Of course, that wouldn't be in his plan would it? This is a farming community, it stands to reason that the farmers don't want their lands and water supplies raped by a mining company.

#6 ^[15]

Sid Saltfork ^[7] wrote 1 hour 27 min ago

My curiosity is why petitions were not circulated by some of the citizens to have the issue put on a referendum ballot. I realize that sometimes things are not made clear until it is too late to get petitions signed; but the next time, there should be enough time. Small town politics are more face to face than in metropolitan areas. You run into each other at the post office, and around the town. Neighbors discuss things. Sometimes; feeling go deep, and last for years. Motives are questioned. Board members, and village presidents new vehicles, or home modifications bring gossip. Better to just shake hands, and drop any recriminations.

#7 ^[16]

cretis16 ^[17] wrote 37 min 23 sec ago

There goes the jobs....if I hear the phrase WE ARE MOVING FORWARD...one more time.

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