

"ANYTHING TWO PEOPLE KNOW IS NOT A SECRET."



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City's trash-to-ethanol project is unlikely to succeed.

A similar effort in New York has only a sign in the ground after 11 years.

by Dave FEATHERLY

Joe Bonds may have put it best: "Why does this seem too good to be true?"

When a remote and small city like Cheyenne, Wyoming is approached about being the nation's guinea pig for a radical new concept in municipal trash disposal - one of converting trash into ethanol and cash - it may just **BE** too good to be true.

As of Wednesday, December 21st, few answers were available about the company which has made startling offer to the City. Nobody seemed to care either.

When I asked about the financial strength or ability of this company to deliver on its parallel promises - to fully fund the construction of such a facility or, if financing or permitting were not accomplished, to pay for the City to transport its trash to another landfill until a new one could be operational in Cheyenne - no one knew.

When asked what financial information the City of Cheyenne had on the new business - what assurances we had that this start-up company has the financial backing which has been the death knell to others who have tried the same effort previously - the city treasurer said she had no financial information about them whatsoever. That she knew absolutely nothing about their financial strength, had not seen a financial statement, and had not seen any letter of credit or bank letter committing a line of credit to this project.

According to the Missouri Secretary of State's website, the newly formed company that has made promises to the City of Cheyenne was just incorporated. Renewable Utility Development Corporation (not "Utilities" as stated by the City and parroted by the WT-E) was incorporated in Missouri on March 17, 2005. Just before the City made them the chosen favorite for the trash to cash project.

An earlier trash-to-ethanol project was announced in Middletown, N.Y., in 1994. It has become widely known as "The Masada Project," and the similarities in potential, size and scope with what is being suggested locally are interesting.

The Masada Project is widely (and wrongly) thought to have been completed. It is referenced in almost every subsequent article about trash to ethanol projects. About all there is to show in Middletown for eleven years of plans, promises and delays is a sign which promises "hundreds of new jobs."

A chronology of events for the Masada Project is available online and has been provided by the local Middletown newspaper, the Times Herald-Record (TH-R). (Page seven details that experience.)

A presentation was recently made to officials from the Wyoming Department of Environmental Quality, Solid Waste Division. The presentation material could have been prepared from data that is readily available on the Internet.

In fact, the material is so poorly prepared that the City used the wrong name to identify the fledgling company which has been selected to accomplish this monumental task. Much of the material retreats from a Belvoir landfill location and tries to cover some ample and exposed backsides.

In justification of the errors of their ways, they (the insiders) now blame a requirement for a double liner system for higher costs. Before the Belvoir Ranch was selected, when a previous City employee tried to mislead those in attendance at a Landfill Advisory Committee meeting, Dave Finley of DEQ made it known that it was almost certainly going to be a requirement for permitting that a landfill located on the Belvoir Ranch granite would need double liners and leak detection. That is not a new development.

The insiders also want residents to believe that circumstances have changed dramatically since they pig-headedly chose a distant and granite-covered site for a new landfill. They are presenting ethanol as a new product that they - in their infinite wisdom - have decided is a viable gas additive and reducer. Really?

Baloney. That fact existed long before the new crew took up offices in City Hall.

Alternative energy sources have been on the front page in most of the United States but Wyoming doesn't take much to things like green power, recycling and conservation. The mayor's stated position has long been that we have unlimited open space and recycling is unimportant - that we should build more landfills.

Often, one becomes an environmentalist out of necessity. The City simply has run out of money and cannot find the money to site a new landfill.

So they went shopping.

At the LAC meetings, any different or radical solution to disposing of Cheyenne's trash such as burning was dismissed out of hand. Too "new age," too "yuppy thinking" for the ex-flyboy. "Too expensive."

So, why now and why Cheyenne?

The why now is mostly the fact that the President recently signed a new Energy Act that will make available beaucoup bucks for unproven companies to fleece - er, coordinate efforts with - unsophisticated cities like Cheyenne, Wyoming. Failures of more competent efforts of the past have been tied to funding.

New groups will now hope to use the strength of a willing community signing on with someone (them) who has never accomplished such a project - to leverage their limited funds and tiny investment.



Garbage Recycling and Ethanol Production Facility Project announced in Middletown, New York in 1994. Sign installed in 2003. Masada Resource Group phones in Birmingham, AL were disconnected in 2005.

Why Cheyenne? Why a community that cannot meet even the most minimal demands for a profitable enterprise?

First, of course, Cheyenne has painted itself in the corner by publicly saying over and over that it needed a new landfill - that the current one could not be expanded even though the purchase of close to a thousand acres which was just for that purpose.

That news was not lost on one of the players in this unfolding little melodrama. The individual making the recent presentation has no personal experience - at least that I could ascertain - with a municipal waste to ethanol project. That's not unusual. Nobody really has such experience. So, this fellow read and heard the words of the City and the opening was there. A City desperate for a solution which they could provide because they've spent all the money was ripe. The moons lined up.

The Belvoir was a rash, dumb and unworkable idea from the get-go and in rode the cavalry. A presentation with no specifics about the financial strength of a start-up company and a DVD of stock footage - with no specific reference to Cheyenne, Wyoming - was enough to excite the wide-eyes. This project is unlikely to succeed. (Story continues on pages 6 and 7.)

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