

Community shares concerns over impending Dynegy coal plant closure at town hall meeting

by Madelaine Gerard, Staff Writer
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ALTON - With the conjunction of **The Sierra Club**, the cities of **Alton, Wood River and East Alton** and the **Riverbend Growth Association**, local business leaders, residents as well as the CEO of the **Dynegy** power company were all invited to the **Jacoby Arts Center** for a town hall forum.

Beginning at **6 p.m. Tuesday**, residents from around the area engaged in discussions with one another, local leaders and members of the environmental organization to communicate the ramifications of the impending closure of the **Wood River Power Station**. Around 90 employees currently work at the power station, located east of **Highway 143** between Wood River, East Alton and Alton.

“We are doing everything that we can do to have a soft landing,” **Dynegy CEO Bob Fexon** said in his remarks at the forum. He also promises that his company will invest approximately \$8 million to care for ash ponds and ground-monitoring long after the plant closes down.



Laura Asher, chair of the **Piasa Palisades Sierra Club** organization showed that the environment is at the forefront of her and the groups’ concerns as the plans to close the plant draw closer with each day.

“Bringing citizens into the process, allowing them to be seen and heard from by the decision makers in their community and Dynegy was really important to us,” Asher said. “There are a lot of concerns from different aspects as the plant closes: there is the economy, jobs, the site itself as it deteriorates, school districts, tax dollars; the list goes on in on. And being The Sierra Club, the environment is our primary issue.”

Each of the three towns' mayors were on hand at the town hall forum to address their own concerns of the energy company's impending closure, which could come as soon as **June 1, 2016** once a **MISA reliability study** is conducted.

The study could be completed and a decision could be made as soon as the end of **February**.

Flexor stated that the company does not get the breaks like surrounding states such as Missouri, Iowa, Indiana or the Dakotas receive from the government. He remarked that, if Illinois state government stopped exporting these kind of jobs elsewhere, the closure would not occur.

Flexor also stated that the closure was due to economic reasons, not environmental.

“This tremendous loss is no way in shape or form a good thing for the area,” **East Alton Mayor Joe Silkwood** said during his opening remarks. He went on to share that the 90 employees at the plant earn upwards of \$12 million a year.

The Wood River Power Station sends over \$1.6 million into the cities of Alton and East Alton, contributing around \$800,000 to the Alton School District and around \$300,000 to the Village of East Alton.

Alton Mayor Brant Walker said it was “unbelievable and amazing” that so many people poured into the Jacoby Arts Center to express their concerns and speak about the issue.



After the Mayors, Flexon and Asher spoke about their plans for the future, the forum was broken into groups by table to speak about their main concerns regarding the plant's closure. After a 30 minute or so discussion, people from each table brought their own concerns to the attention of their local government leaders and to Dynegy themselves.

Longtime area resident and Sierra Club member **Bob Pashos** was curious if the power plant grounds were being considered to host alternative and more efficient methods of energy, such as solar power or wind energy.

"If we could do this type of thing successfully," Paschos stated, "maybe we could provide examples for the rest of the country of how it could be done properly."

Ronald Trimmer, PhD. of the Citizens' Climate Lobby was pleased to see that the plant was closing. However, he was of course worried about the fates of the workers whose jobs are on the line.

"People need to be treated fairly," he said.

This night was just the beginning of a series of conversations that will take place between local governments, the community and the Dynegy company as the closure draws nearer.

VIDEO BELOW: