

# **Alton's green revolution: How a hypothetical sale of the wastewater treatment facility may effect the resource recovery center**

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ALTON - After Thursday's article regarding the unanimous vote of the Alton City Council to approve talks to sell the city's municipal wastewater treatment facility to Illinois American Water, many contacted Riverbender.com asking about the proposed Alton Resource Recovery Center's future.

Alton's Wastewater Treatment Director Steve Gibson said Friday morning the plan was still in action, echoing an additional assurance from Alton Mayor Brant Walker Thursday. While the location will be changed - due to the original plans for the recovery center to be built on the current location of Alton's wastewater treatment facility, which may soon change hands to Illinois American Water - plans are still good for the resource recovery center. In fact, Gibson said his office will be presenting updated plans to the Alton City Council during its April 25, 2018 meeting - a meeting he said everyone should attend.

"I would hope everyone would come to that meeting and hear what we have to say," he said. "This is huge for Alton."

The project, which Gibson has been researching and building for six years, would take bio-solids from wastewater (yes, that does include poo-poo) and utilizing it for the creation of clean natural gas, which could be shipped via underground pipelines across the country for fueling transportation. Gibson said that natural gas would create the main driver behind the project - revenue for the city.

If the fuel is used for transportation, the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) will award what is called a D3 RIN or Renewable Identification Number. These RINs are the currency of renewable energy trade. According to the Renewable Fuel Standard, refiners and importers of petroleum are required to produce a certain amount of renewable energy each year. While they rarely do, they are able to purchase RINs from agencies who do. Gibson said a D3 classification is the best possible RIN classification, and Alton's Resource Recovery Center would produce those.

Gibson said the sale of RINs to petroleum-based industries would be the main economic driver behind the center. He said the estimate of revenue would be available at the April 25 presentation. He said the same of the initial cost. Due to the city's recent vote to negotiate a contract with Illinois American Water, Alton's outdated wastewater treatment facility is no longer a place to put the proposed facility. Gibson said the city is looking at other locations, but could not disclose where at this time.

One of the main concerns of Walker and Gibson regarding the project's future is feed stocks. Gibson said initial research and outreach has garnered the promise of feed stocks from several municipalities.

"Getting municipalities is more sustainable than businesses," Gibson said. "Municipalities don't shut down and close their doors."

As of now, there are only six such facilities permitted for operation in the United States. By the time Alton would begin construction on its own, however, there may be as many as a dozen in operation.

“I know a number of larger municipalities in the United States are looking at doing the exact same thing,” Gibson said.

By April 25, further details, such as costs and possible profits as well as a proposed location will be revealed, Gibson said. Ultimately, however, the decision to get that facility in Alton will rest on the shoulders of the city's alder-people, who will vote for it once it gets closer to a tangible reality.