



FutureGen keeps on generating

Excitement evident at public forum

By Mike Helenthal
The Tuscola Review

Residents were given the opportunity to get up close and personal with federal officials overseeing the FutureGen siting process at an open house and scoping meeting held last Tuesday.

Several hundred people were estimated in attendance, and roughly 250 people stayed around for the official public comment period associated with the project's pending environmental impact study.

Comment time involved a long line of local public officials, state legislators, labor representatives and the general public, all in support of the project. The event was sponsored by the U.S. Department of Energy's National Energy Technology Laboratory and Tuscola Economic Development Inc.

Though Tuscola has already been on a long road of trying to land the futuristic, near-zero emissions power plant, Tuesday's meeting was the beginning of just one more process before one of four finalist towns is awarded the almost \$1 billion project.

Following that meeting a 30-day comment period, specifically seeking input concerning the local environmental impact of the project, is set, followed by the completion of the draft environmental impact study. After notification of the prospective cities of the results of the draft EIS, another 45-day comment period is offered, culminating with a second public hearing.

That's when the wheels really turn into motion as several federal agencies work to reconcile data from their collection and study process as well as consideration of comments made during the

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public hearings. Once the final EIS is released, another 30-day wait will lead to possibly another public meeting during the "public involvement period."

The final decision, made after combining original siting and EIS data is expected to be released next year, with construction on the plant scheduled to start in July of 2009. After three years of construction, the plant would open in 2012.

Tuesday's public comment session include comments from many area leaders, including Southern Illinois University President Glen Poshard, most local politicians and representatives of several state agencies. TEDP's Director read com-

ments from many of the state's federal representatives, including Sen. Barack Obama and Sen. Dick Durbin.

Mark McCoy, FutureGen environmental manager for NETL, said told those in attendance the goal of the FutureGen plant was to "leapfrog" existing technology. He said the plant would utilize technology that already exists, but will tie several of those technologies together to further increase efficiency.

McCoy said FutureGen's immediate goals include the capture of 90 percent of carbon dioxide, to become the prototype for a new generation of coal-fired plants, to push technology and generate power on a commercial scale.

The open house portion of the presentation allowed attendees to mingle with officials working on the

project and ask questions. Several presentations were set up to explain the FutureGen process, which allows the carbon dioxide released from the burning of coal to be captured, liquified and pumped into underground "storage" areas determined by geography. The liquified CO2 is pumped into abandoned oil fields, and natural geologic structures that allow the absorption of the greenhouse gas and capped with impermeable. Tuscola and Mattoon were picked specifically because they, along with most of the state, sit on an ideal geologic formation for housing the plant. The two towns were chosen even more specifically because of infrastructure considerations. And the EIS, which will show the impact the plant will have on the final four towns, two of which are in Texas, will be the final phase of selection.

Next up for Tuscola officials is a walk in the DuQuoin State Fair to promote FutureGen; then next week there is a meeting set with Boomtown U.S.A. author Jack Schulz.

Shulz will be speaking about Tuscola's Boomtown Institute, a program designed to get community members involved in planning for the city's future.

"We want people from all walks of the community," Moody said.

The community committees will participate in an action plan as officials try to determine Tuscola's "brand," or marketable commodity.

"Anybody in the county is welcome," he said. "I would to see as many people as were there Tuesday. We want people who aren't typically involved."