



Bright Ideas

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by Jay Henry

It was so fitting to have a company named Bright Ideas Energy Solutions give a presentation at the village board meeting last night. Whose bright idea was this anyway? In another gesture at going green, Mayor Pat Kitching trotted out representatives from this energy solutions company to share their expertise on the subject.

Sometimes I think we're treated to these presentations to artificially extend the duration of board meetings due to the relative lack of substantive information provided by our elected officials. I'm extremely skeptical about the mayor's "desire" to offset the village's electrical consumption with some sort of energy-producing field of dreams. But I digress.

What did we learn from the presentation? Well, the presenters haven't actually seen the land that the mayor has been talking about as a potential "energy park." Regardless ... the show must go on, so they offered some products and solutions that we might want to consider. This sure strengthens my confidence. Their list of reference clients and projects didn't include a single entry that could be construed as similar to what the Alsip project might look like.

Almost all of the products they spoke about were point-of-use applications with small-scale power generating capabilities. How small you may wonder? Well, the largest was listed at 20kW – other sizes beginning at 2kW.

2kW – should sound kind of small – even to a non-technical person. 2kW ... or 2,000 Watts is slightly more power than a hair dryer or toaster might use. And that's its MAXIMUM rated capacity. A standard rule-of-thumb is to figure 30% of the rated capacity may be attainable over the long-term. That's 600 Watts ... or the equivalent of 10 – 60 Watt light bulbs!

I fully support energy conservation and the use of renewable resources for energy generation. It's a no-brainer ... it's like saying we support motherhood and apple pie.

The problem I have with the mayor's initiative is that it doesn't pass some basic common sense tests:

- If it's that easy to do, and financially beneficial, why aren't more (or any) communities already doing it?
- Why didn't the company called in to present have similar case studies to the type of project the mayor has in mind?
- Are there more important projects that should be looked at BEFORE Alsip takes on this potential albatross?

Some of the technologies needed to even make this a break-even proposition are on the bleeding edge ... easy to see how they might become money pits ... costing tax payers for years to come. I can walk out my front door and see the smoke stack from the Robbins incinerator ... an every day reminder of local power generation gone bad.

Why now? This sure has all the markings of an election-year, pie-in-the-sky stunt similar to the Pulaski Beautification push when the mayor was last elected. One only need look at the current sad state of Pulaski and the empty store fronts to be reminded of how successful that initiative proved to be.