

Support Your Local NIMBY

Or would you rather we build a power plant -- and 'create jobs' -- in your backyard?

By LAWRENCE A. BAKER

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Counterpoint

Llewellyn King's commentary "**Stand up to NIMBYs -- and create jobs**" (Feb. 7) bemoans the fact that many infrastructure projects, particularly power plants, can't be built because of opposition by **NIMBYs** (not in my back yard).

Many of these projects are social and environmental boondoggles that benefit few except their corporate owners. To these I say "good riddance."

As the retired chair of the award-winning **Friends of the Sunrise River**, I am an experienced NIMBY. Members from our group and others have spent thousands of hours fighting the construction of a 720 MW electrical power plant that LS Power, a New-Jersey-based energy company, proposed to build in Chisago County.

To counter King's main point, while hundreds of people are hired temporarily to build a power plant, the proposed LS plant would employ only 25 people during operation, adding only 0.1 percent to employment in Chisago County.

The \$1.5 million per year "in-lieu" payments that LS Power would pay to local governments would account for only 2 percent of government expenditures in Chisago County. A power plant is far from a golden egg to the community.

These modest economic benefits are offset by considerable costs. Based on a study at the University of California at Berkeley, our group estimated that homeowners within a 5-mile radius would lose \$16 million (mid-point estimate) in property value.

A homeowner with a \$300,000 property very near the plant would lose an estimated \$21,000. The county would incur a corresponding loss of property tax.

We speculate that the power plant might also have a negative impact on Chisago County's tourism and recreation industry, which now employs 1,300 full-time equivalents and supports a payroll of \$33 million.

The environmental impacts of a power plant extend far beyond the immediate "backyard."

The original Chisago County design would have withdrawn five million gallons of cooling water per day from the pristine Mount Simon-Hinkley aquifer -- as much as all other water uses in the county, possibly depleting this critical resource.

During periods when the plant would use diesel fuel as a "backup" (weeks at a time when natural gas



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prices are high) approximately 100 large tanker trucks per day would be traveling on local roads.

Power plants, even gas-fired ones, also produce air pollution, which especially affects those with asthma and other airway diseases.

The National Academy of Sciences estimated that the typical cost of health impacts of a gas-fired power plant is 16 cents per kilowatt hour. Assuming that the LS plant would operate 100 days per year, this translates to a health impact cost of \$3 million per year.

Finally, the proposed power plant was utterly inconsistent with Chisago County's Comprehensive Plan, which notes that residents "have consistently expressed a desire for preservation of natural resources, rural character, cultural and historic resources, wildlife habitats and general open space."

Residents living in areas zoned "rural residential" or "agriculture" have a right to expect enforcement of county zoning regulations.

In March 2010, county commissioners signed a "development agreement" with LS Power, a first step toward allowing construction of the plant, despite widespread opposition. In so doing, the commissioners created a climate of distrust that may persist for years.

Our group extracted one major concession: the development agreement forbids LS Power from using groundwater for cooling, a point on which nearly

everyone concurred.

The matter is now before a court, which will decide whether the county illegally ignored its Comp Plan. LS Power has not yet filed its plan with the Minnesota Public Utilities Commission, but when it does, the NIMBYs will be there.

New power plants are best located in designated industrial zones, making it feasible to use "combined heat and power" (CHP) designs.

CHP uses excess heat from power production to heat nearby buildings, raising the efficiency of a typical base load plant from 35 percent to nearly 90 percent. We should also think "conservation first" to get more out of our existing power production capacity before building new plants.

For those who argue the need for job creation, I agree. With interest rates at near-historic lows and construction unemployment hovering around 20 percent, this is an ideal time to rebuild our crumbling roads, bridges, schools, and water systems.

Local residents will nearly always support these efforts.

NIMBYs are often the only force to stop corporate exploitation of our backyards, or at least compel sustainable development. For those who scorn their efforts, I will happily supply you with LS Power's contact information -- and you can ask them to build a power plant in your backyard.

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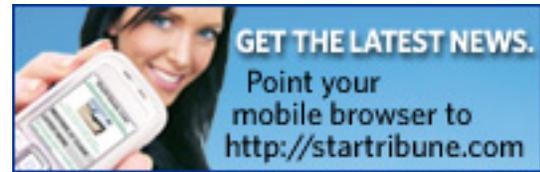
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