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Company interested in Marion as potential site of plasma arc center

City responding to company with letter of interest

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News Editor

Even as the city of Marion is waiting on the final draft of a study into the economic feasibility of a plasma arc waste conversion facility in Marion, a company has approached the city with an interest in bringing such a facility to town.

The city is expecting to receive the final results of the state-funded feasibility study by next week. Marion received $150,000 from the state last year, with the goal of determining which plasma arc byproducts would make the most economical sense in the area.

Plasma arc technology is a process of waste conversion through which solid waste is subjected to a plasma torch and turned into a reusable product, such as electricity or methanol. WastenotIowa, a Marion-based environmental group, has been advocating the technology to the city as an alternative to burying the city's 90 tons of residential waste per day at a landfill, such as the Linn County Solid Waste

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Agency's County Home Road location. Only a handful of plasma arc facilities exist in the U.S., mostly operated privately. Most facilities are based outside the country, particularly in Canada and Japan.

At a city council work session earlier this month, WastenotIowa member Charlie Kress and City Manager Lon Pluckhahn gave the council an update on the latest with the feasibility study, as well as informing them of Tepa's interest in building a plasma arc facility somewhere in Iowa.

Pluckhahn said that Tepa is looking for community interest in the location where they undertake the project. The company seeks to build a facility that would initially handle 125 tons of waste per day, with the goal of upgrading to handle 375 to 400 tons per day within a few years. The $100 to $150 million the project would cost would be entirely provided by Tepa.

In return, Pluckhahn said Tepa is looking for a commitment of waste for conversion. The city currently has an arrangement to transport its waste to the Linn County Solid Waste Agency, but the 90 tons Marion produces each day could be completely utilized by the first phase of the project. A 400-ton facility, by comparison, would be capable of handling two-thirds of Linn County's total waste output of 600 tons per day.

The council agreed that the city should draft a request for proposals to Tepa, stating Marion's interest in being considered for Tepa's proposed facility. Pluckhahn said that further negotiations would likely go from there. No further action was taken at the meeting.

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The *Times* Editorial

With plasma arc center, Marion has chance to lead the way into the future

2010 could prove to be a big year for Marion, if Tepa Technologies chooses it as the location of a plasma arc waste disposal facility. As one of the first of its kind in the country, such a facility would place the city at the forefront of the shift toward, alternative energy sources.

A plasma arc facility is capable of taking a certain amount of solid waste each day and through use of a high-powered plasma torch, turning it into a byproduct, such as electricity. The initial plant that Tepa would like to build could handle roughly 120 tons of garbage each day.

For comparison, Marion creates 90 tons of residential waste daily, which means that a plasma arc facility of this size would be able to completely eliminate the city's footprint at the Linn County Solid Waste Agency. It also means that, in addition to that waste being eliminated, it would be transformed into an alternative form of energy that can power the area in place of coal, oil and natural gas.

We at the Times are enthusiastically in favor of Tepa coming to Marion, because we feel that alternative energy is likely to be the next major industry, and one in which Iowa is already poised to be a leader, between ethanol and wind farms in the western part of the state. A plasma arc facility would likewise place Marion in a pioneering position, hopefully helping to prove to the world that new, renewable energy sources are both economically and practically feasible.