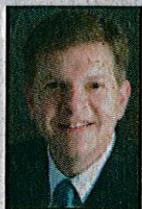


Senate bill would help funding at EcoComplex

BY SHARON MCBRAYER

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HICKORY — Catawba County officials are hoping a local bill introduced in the state Senate will help fund a project that would turn wood debris into energy.



Allran

Sen. Austin Allran, R-Catawba, Iredell, introduced the bill this week. It passed the first reading and was referred to the committee

on commerce.

The bill, Senate Bill 293, seeks to "authorize the establishment of EcoComplex Renewable Energy Demonstration Parks in Catawba County." Catawba County currently has an EcoComplex at the Blackburn Landfill, which turns landfill gas into electricity.

However, the county plans to build a system that will burn wood waste to make more electricity and thermal energy. The wood would come from debris cleared from land, some furniture and pallets.

Barry Edwards, director of

utilities and engineering for the county, said local legislators were asked to introduce the bill in the state legislature. The bill allows the complex to receive triple credit up to 20 megawatts. The county produces 2.5 megawatts of electricity per hour. A megawatt is 1 million watts. Being able to receive the additional credit will help the complex pay for planned future expansion, say officials.

Edwards said the additional renewable energy credits will help them raise enough revenue to build a wood gasification system. The cost of the system is expected to be around \$20 million, he said. According to county officials, the county estimates a net profit over a 20-year loan to be more than \$4.4 million. The energy generated at the complex is sold to Duke Energy and other customers. The revenue from the additional credits will help make the payments on the wood gasification system, say officials.

Edwards said county com-

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missioners gave the OK to move forward with getting the system as long as it pays for itself.

In addition to giving the county a way to raise funds to pay for the system, the bill also will help generate economic development and jobs by attracting new businesses that want to be near or part of the complex, said Jack Chandler, assistant director of utilities and engineering for Catawba County. Some companies just want to be located next to a complex that produces green energy.

There are several private companies at the EcoComplex. The county has partnered with private enterprise and universities, which has created more than 150 jobs and \$30 million in taxable investments, according to information from Catawba County. Appalachian State University has united with the county to create a center for biodiesel research and production.

Edwards said the complex is in the process of growing biodiesel crops, which will be

turned into fuel to power the county fleet of cars. He said the complex will be doing about 1,000 gallons of biodiesel fuel weekly. He said they currently burn 400 gallons of fuel a day at the landfill.

DETAILS:

» **Senate Bill:** 293

» **EcoComplex location:**

Rocky Ford Road at
Blackburn Landfill

» **Produces:** 2.5 megawatts
of electricity per hour

» **Megawatt:** is 1 million
watts

» **Energy generated:** sold to
Duke Energy