

Mike Reuter

I am speaking here as an individual and not as the Mayor of Kalama.

NWIW is a start-up company that is trying to build the world's largest methanol refinery, and the prototype that this refineries technology is based on is no longer in service and hasn't been in years.

The systemic lack of information to regulators and community members has been going on for years because they are going off the cuff and working out the details as they go along.

This Kalama methanol refinery is also a prototype in the sense that no methanol refinery in the world uses both ULE and ZLD technologies together.

The thing that concerns me the most is that if ULE was the most environmentally way of making methanol, how come there hasn't been another refinery that uses this technology in the decades that follow?

The articles below show how this played out in Tacoma, where the first methanol refinery by NWIW was to be built.

The Newstribune

APRIL 05, 2016 06:31 PM , UPDATED APRIL 07, 2016 02:35 PM

Proponents of a \$3.4 billion methanol project on the Tacoma Tideflats do not plan to meet with Port of Tacoma commissioners before an April 25 vote on its lease.

Last week commissioners said they wanted Northwest Innovation Works to justify why it wanted an extension of the feasibility period of its lease.

However, company officials told the port that nobody is available to talk with the commission this week, said port spokeswoman Tara Mattina. After this week, there are conflicts in commissioner and port executive calendars.

"To me, it means they've lost interest," said Port of Tacoma Commissioner Don Johnson. He said he likes to take time to consider a vote. "From my perspective, I don't see myself making a decision on the 25th that benefits them."

The port commission approved the lease with Northwest Innovation Works nearly two years ago. The lease includes several phases, one of which is the feasibility period.

Without an extension in the feasibility period, the China-backed company could pay hundreds of thousands more dollars per month than its current \$8,000 monthly terms. It would also lose the ability to back out of the lease if the feasibility period expires.

Commissioner Dick Marzano said Tuesday that he is "disappointed" in the company's decision and "skeptical" of anything the company might promise on April 25.

"I'm quite disappointed, to be perfectly frank," Marzano said. "... This has been the focal point for such a long period of time, and rightfully so. It's hard to go any further."

Commissioner Don Meyer said earlier this year that he wanted to give the public ample time to view any changes to the company's lease before a commission vote.

"I've slowly reached the conclusion that we have a faulty lease no matter what happens on the extension period," Meyer said Monday.

Company president Murray "Vee" Godley has presented to the port commission a few times on the project. Meyer said Godley's lack of availability this week has put the company into a difficult position: "His burden, not necessarily ours."

Last week commissioners said there are more questions than answers related to the methanol project, and Northwest Innovations has had nearly two years to answer them.

Commission President Connie Bacon said Monday, "There are so many things (I'd like to hear) that it's hard to pick from. The community has asked a lot of questions, and so far there have not been specific answers. And I hope they come equipped with some answers."

Bacon said if the commission denies an extension of the feasibility period, the company has five days to either terminate or move on to the so-called "construction phase," where it will pay hundreds of thousands of dollars more per month.

Tacoma methanol project canceled

By Kate Martin

APRIL 19, 2016 06:01 AM , UPDATED APRIL 21, 2016 10:00 PM

"As the process continued, it became increasingly clear the community was frustrated by the lack of answers on important questions," the spokeswoman, Jaime Smith, wrote in an email. "Jobs matter, but so does our commitment to safety, clean air and clean water."

"The commissioners' views of the project's backer had soured in recent weeks. Several commissioners had expressed frustration at the lack of information they were getting from Northwest Innovation Works. Commissioner Clare Petrich said the commission had been waiting too long for answers to basic questions."

"You cannot expect them to go on without providing that kind of information forever," she said last month.

Earlier this month, some commissioners said they were skeptical the company could persuade them to vote for the extension, given the lack of information.

"They could give us any kind of schedule they want, but who's to say it would be accomplished or done?" Marzano said. "I don't know what they've done — that's the thing. I haven't heard one thing they have done yet."

How Tacoma's methanol debate went sideways, and what we can learn from it

By Matt Driscoll

APRIL 23, 2016 04:00 AM , UPDATED APRIL 26, 2016 09:47 AM

The methanol conversation reached its nadir because some suspected the public process was stacked against average citizens, the company behind the would-be refinery failed at nearly every opportunity to provide even the most basic information, and people wanted answers to legitimate questions and they just couldn't get them.

"There was a tremendous amount of fear and frustration," Mello observed, in what might be the understatement of the year.

In this vacuum, the conversation went sideways. That's not absolving anyone's behavior, it's seeking to understand what happened beyond simply pointing fingers at the public from positions of power.

"I think the temperature in Tacoma, the outrage, was more intense than I've seen anywhere else. And I actually think some of it was justified," Eric de Place, policy director at the Sightline Institute, offered. "The problem I think is, with a lot of these projects, the existing power structures we have all seem to kind of bake in the outcome, right from the beginning. ... To an ordinary community member, it can seem like they're getting railroaded."