

County faces tough choices on Rockwool infrastructure

By **TIM COOK**
Special to the Spirit



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MIKE GEORGE

Charles Town City Council member

CHARLES TOWN — A groundswell of opposition that arose this summer to the Rockwool factory beginning to force hard choices.

Anti-Rockwool activists are urging leaders to reject two free infrastructure funding deals from the West Virginia Department of Commerce, acts of defiance that will inevitably trigger a rate increase for the city's and the county's utility customers, utility officials said.

Moreover, turning down the funding deals still won't stop Rockwool from obtaining the water and sewer services its factory needs, they said.

"I've mentioned it at meetings many times ... voting down this zero-percent interest guaranteed loan [from state officials] will not stop Rockwool," said Charles Town City Council Member Mike George.

George serves as a council representative to the CTUB board who has worked for months to help negotiate merging Ranson's sewer system and operations of the Jefferson County Public Service District into Charles Town's larger utility system.

That consolidation included taking on Ranson's previous obligations to build a city sewer line to the Rockwool factory, he said.

Last week, 12 members of the Jefferson County Development Authority

resigned just as they were preparing to vote on a \$7 million West Virginia Department of Commerce funding package to cover the cost of a water line extension to the Rockwool factory.

The line would be operated and eventually owned by Jefferson Utilities, Inc. in Kearneysville. The project also includes erecting an 800,000-gallon water storage tank, and water service to the Fox Glen subdivision and North Jefferson Elementary School.

Lee Snyder, the owner of Jefferson Utilities, said turning down the state's funding package will not stop Rockwool from building its plant. He said, as with sewer, the company will find another way to access the thousands of gallons of water it needs daily to operate its facility, even through another arrangement with JUI.

Snyder said such a move would only leave current and future JUI customers with higher water rates in the future.

On Dec. 3, the Charles Town City Council will vote on to either take state's cost-free deal to build a high-capacity sewer line that will serve the factory. The other option would have Rockwool build or finance the line on its own.

Jane Arnett, manager of CTUB, said how much the rate increase would be isn't known yet. But if the City Council decides to forgo the state's financing offer, the question will not be whether but how much of a rate increase utility customers will absorb, she said.

Last month the City Council was presented with three choices over the new six-mile, approximately \$10 million

sewer line that would run from Charles Town to the 130-acre Rockwool site. Accepting the sewer line funding from the state would require the city to authorize a bond that would amount to a long-term interest-free loan.

Rockwool could also build its own separate sewer line connected into the city's utility system. Both alternatives would lead to higher rates for current and future customers of the city utility, CTUB officials have said.

Under the so-called Rule 5.5, a provision sometimes used by developers, Rockwool would be able to construct the sewer line itself, Arnett said.

The West Virginia Public Service Commission calculated the company's fair cost to build the sewer line at \$9.5 million and the city would have to pay the remaining costs. The PSC determined that Rockwool would then get all of the proceeds from future utility customers that use the sewer line over the next decade, Arnett said.

Another significant provision in the PSC's decision would require CTUB to pay the cost of maintaining the sewer line, Arnett said.

Those construction and maintenance costs over a decade could be considerable — enough to require a rate increase, she said.

The sewer line would serve current and future commercial and residential development in the county. It would also save CTUB about \$1.6 million in costs toward a \$7 million Flowing

Springs Transmission Project to upgrade an aging sewer system serving various businesses and homes, including the Breckenridge development in Shenandoah Junction, Arnett said.

The Flowing Springs Project now serves customers of the Jefferson County Public Service District, which CTUB is legally taking over.

Savings over the project would be lost if Rockwool built the sewer line. The two systems could not be built so that they could be integrated to achieve operational efficiencies, Arnett said.

As another possible option allowed by the PSC, Rockwool could build the sewer line that would serve only its factory, and not other future customers, Arnett said.

That option would prevent the company from recovering its construction costs from service-rate revenues from additional future customers, she said.

That option would also eliminate any cost savings for the Flowing Springs Project, and it would forgo a major sewer line that could serve future commercial growth and residential development in Jefferson County.

Asked what the rate increase would be for city and county utility customers if the Charles Town City Council turns down the state's offer to finance the sewer line, Arnett said there are too many variables to work out to know that amount now.

"It's a big question mark," she said.

Brown FROM PAGE A5

lic servant," Brown says. "The labor movement has not had the wind at its back for a long time. There is an anti-worker agenda, and most labor organizers don't look like me. It is a predominantly male space, and yet I have learned negotiation skills, and had allies and mentors. I have learned to develop actions that have policy impact. The labor movement has definitely

shaped my view of how to govern and how to serve."

She has worked with the state AFL-CIO on projects related to health care employment.

Brown has been a labor organizer on state and national levels. "It has been a rough and tumble experience—and very useful, especially in working in politics in West Virginia. The government is gridlocked, and people no longer feel the need to listen to each other. That needs to change. We need to communi-

cate with each other, and with our constituents. I hope to work in a way in which the needs and wants of the people are able to meet the features and benefits of a particular government policy."

Brown supports the efforts to prevent the Danish manufacturing company, Rockwool, from building a major heavy industry plant in Jefferson County. She says that the Jefferson County Development Authority mistook the will of the people for what kind of work and

play environment is wanted here.

"I think that is why the board of the JCDA resigned together—there was recognition that the decision [to invite Rockwool] was not in accord with the values set that operates for a majority of people who live here."

As Jefferson County's newest state lawmaker, Brown wants to represent the values of the majority of her constituents. Given recent actions in Jefferson County, she can count on hearing from them if she doesn't.

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United Bank to Louie A. Lee III and Yamile T. Lee; LT 2368, SEC 23-I; Kabletown District; \$259,000.00

Fredd Chinn and Diana Chinn to Ryan Braithwaite; LT 15, BLK 108; Ranson Corporation; \$125,000.00

Donald W. Painter Jr. to William J. Ault; LT 4, sEC 3, T/W Water Rights, Read Document; Shepherdstown District; \$119,900.00

Gregory A. Wells and Carolina C. Wells FKA Carolina O. Champagne to Joshua H. Bendit and Kristin M. Long; LTS 41, 42, 43 and 44, SEC 2A; Kabletown District; \$218,000.00

Brandon Douglas Wheelbarger and Jaime L. Wheelbarger FKA Jaime Lynn Warren to Gregory A. Wells and Carolina O. Wells; LT 356, PH 2B; SEC 2; Charles town Corporation; \$315,800.00

Delreise Morton to Jeffry D. Gorton and Mary Jeanne Gorton; TH LT 102; Charles Town District; \$212,000.00

Gendon A. Kincaid and Virginia L. Kincaid to Bruce L. Kenney and Patricia L. Kenney; LT 2; Middleway District; \$308,000.00

Thomas P. Mankowich and Christine A. Mankowich to Charles L. Balzli and Jessica M. Balzli; LT 41, SEC 2; Harpers Ferry District; \$318,000.00

Michael S. Arant and Linda R. Arant to Nicholas Stipanovic and Kelsey Propps; PCL P/O Sites Farm, CT 4.605 ACS; Middleway District; \$275,000.00

Chad Dinges to Steven J. Deschaine and Amber R. Deschaine; LT 195, PH 2B, SEC 1B; Charles Town Corporation; \$301,000.00

Steven A. Baskerville and Heather M. Baskerville AIF Heather M. Baskerville to Mark V. Wedman; LT 11, The Point; Shepherdstown District; \$448,000.00

Elizabeth T. Haney to Pasha M. Majdi and Jayme R. Majdi; LTS 5 and 6, BLK S; Harpers Ferry Corporation; \$530,000.00

K Hovnanian Homes at Shenandoah Springs LLC and K Hovnanian developments of West Virginia Inc. to Wells Fargo Bank NA TR and Patri-

cia Kelly settlement Trust; LT 14, BLK D; Ranson Corporation; \$399,989.00

Sandra Culebro Contreras and Maria C. Salgado to Charles T. Rice and Brenda A. Rice; LT 126, SEC II; Kabletown District; \$330,000.00

Law Office of Kathy M. Santa Barbara PLLC SUCC TR Elena Carter Trott Property to John Sorrell and Agnes Sorrell; LT 4, SEC X; Harpers Ferry District; \$10,100.00

US Bank National Association TR, TBW Mortgage-Backed Trust Series 2007-2, TBW Mortgage Pass-Through Certificates series 2007-2 and OCWEN Loan Servicing LLC AIF to David Ottey and Tamera Ottey; LTS 14, 15, 16 and 17, SEC 1 M; Kabletown District; \$133,678.00

Eric D. Waggy to Hollie C. Jacobs; LTS 9 and 10, BLK 5; Charles Town District; \$175,000.00

Roland Ridell to Michael Storer; LTS 33, 34,35, and 36, SEC 18F; Kabletown District; \$177,500.00

Travis M. Smith to Cody M. Hyden and Jessica A. Surber; LT 20; Bolivar Corporation; \$142,900.00

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