

THE WILLIAMS LAKE TRIBUNE



A wood fibre gasification project to create renewable natural gas is being proposed for Williams Lake that could potentially co-locate at the Atlantic Power Corp. site. (Monica Lamb-Yorski photo - Williams Lake Tribune)

Renewable natural gas project proposed for Williams Lake

If developed the facility would use a wood fibre processing model developed in Sweden

By Monica Lamb-Yorski | March 10, 2020

A wood fibre processing plant that would produce renewable natural gas (RNG) is being proposed for Williams Lake.

Mayor Walt Cobb announced the project at the regular meeting Tuesday, March 10, saying if it is built it would be the first of its kind in North America.

“It will turn wood into natural gas to go right in the gas line,” Cobb said. “It doesn’t need any other processing. The residual is basically sand and there’s so little left through this process that has been demonstrated to us.”

Cobb said Fortis BC has committed to developing more RNG projects and the potential to provide natural gas to Williams Lake from a sustainable energy source is something the City is interested in pursuing.

“The work that we have undertaken so far demonstrates that the City can have an active role in both creating the investment climate and fostering the partnerships necessary to move a project such as this along to the development stage,” Cobb said.

He praised the City’s economic development officer Beth Veenkamp for her work on the project with the proponent Transition Energy Inc., Fortis BC, the Ministry of Forests, Lands, Natural Resources and Economic Development and Atlantic Power Corporation.

If developed, the facility could potentially be co-located at the existing Atlantic Power Corp. biomass-fired generating facility site on Mackenzie Avenue North, Cobb said.

Veenkamp said a representative from Transition Energy Inc. made a cold call to the City in May 2019 and explained the project.

"I thought it would be a good business-to-business relationship with Atlantic Power, introduced them and we started running with it," Veenkamp said.

Nick Galotti, SVP of Operations for Atlantic Power, stated in a press release the project is interesting and could have great potential as the fibre supply situation in the Williams Lake area become clearer.

"Finding new ways to be good stewards of the environment and our limited natural resources is something that has always been on our radar," Galotti stated. "We appreciate that the City of Williams Lake staff are actively working to keep our site in Williams Lake viable well into the future."

Cobb said it would not cost to the City anything other than Veenkamp's time and Veenkamp said the City's part will be to support the developer in accessing green technology grants that might be available.

"The developer is also going to have a publicly-traded company in the next couple of weeks and will be raising capital as well," Veenkamp said.

Renewable natural gas projects that exist in B.C. in places like the Lower Mainland are usually associated with landfills, Veenkamp explained.

"In rural communities, like ours, we are never going to have that amount of waste to pursue projects like that so this is why this one is very unique because it is a process based on the GoBiGas Plant in Sweden where they have been using wood fibre to get renewable natural gas," Veenkamp said. "It's a real opportunity for Northern rural communities to tap into something like this."

Coun. Scott Nelson said the project could be a 'huge catalyst' in helping the community diversify its economy.

"Through the mayor's office we aggressively went after long-term commitments for fibre supply with the ministry of forests, and pulled all the key partners together," Nelson said. "It's unique opportunity for Williams Lake and a template for the province of B.C."