

Thursday, Aug. 27, 2009

Land-use changes could thwart Eastalco plans

Study: Development could generate jobs at shuttered smelter property

by Chris Huntemann | Staff Writer

[E-mail this article](#) | [Print this article](#)

More News

- District Heights seeking donations for winter coat drive
- Chiefs: Staff cuts could mean gaps in coverage
- Agreement recognizes child care providers
- Mock disaster in Bethesda tests region's readiness
- Annual dance competition celebrates Latin culture

It's been more than three years since aluminum giant Alcoa shuttered its Eastalco smelting plant in Adamstown, idling hundreds of workers. Now the company wants to market the property for new industrial uses that could generate thousands of jobs and millions in tax revenues, but proposed changes to Frederick County's land-use plans might stymie those efforts.

As part of the ongoing update to the county's comprehensive plan, the Frederick County Planning Commission has suggested changing the Eastalco property's current land usage, which includes light and general industrial use, plus some agriculture.

The plant opened in 1970 but stopped operations in 2005 when its annual electric costs were projected to rise from \$82 million to \$156 million. All told, 625 workers lost their jobs.

The planning commission proposes changing the permitted use of about 770 acres, or 58 percent, of the property's 1,320 industrially zoned acres, which includes a railroad line.

"It decreases the value of our property, but we also feel it hurts the potential economic development of the county," said Earl H. Robbins Jr., manager of North American public strategy for Alcoa, of the proposed changes.

But some members of the Planning Commission envision other uses for the land, said Robert L. White Jr., the commission's secretary.

"The plant itself is shut down and an industrial use for a railroad in Frederick County is negligible," White said.

For example, he said, the railroad spur at the Intercoastal Industrial Center near New Market did not generate any additional interest for that property.



Bill Ryan/The Gazette
Recommended land-use changes would not only decrease "the value of our property, but we also feel it hurts the potential economic development of the county," says Earl H. Robbins Jr., an Alcoa spokesman.

TOP JOBS

\$20/Hr Paralegic Dr
needs morning aide at home in Chevy Chase: 6:30am-9am. M-F [More](#)

SUNRISE Seeks Experienced
& Qualified TEACHERS & AIDS For Pre-School Center. Call [More](#)

[See All Featured Ads](#)

SEARCH DIRECTORIES

[Fall homes page](#)
[Search all directories](#)

[Place a classifieds ad now](#)

WEEKLY SPECIALS

ACCOUNTING, TAX & ASSET PROTECTION

"People profit by knowing us" Harpal... [More](#)

BETHESDA GIANT TAG SALE Sat.

10/24, 8:30a-3p Furn, Clothes, books,... [More](#)

Handyman Jim Ness

FEATURED JOBS

INSURANCE SAVINGS SML
INSURANCE AGENCY: Auto, Home, Life, Health and Business Insurance. [More](#)

ADMIN ASSIST/ REAL
ESTATE FT assistant for residential realtor, excellent communication [More](#)

FOREMAN Small Construction
company needs experienced Foreman who will work on jobs and can [More](#)

[More](#)

[See All Featured Ads](#)



County Commissioner Kai Hagen, the board's liaison to the Planning Commission, said the commission is simply making tentative recommendations that the amount of industrially zoned land on the Eastalco property be reduced.

"Much of the industrially zoned land has not been used or developed since the original plant was built," Hagen said.

Alcoa commissioned a recent study by Sage Policy Group, an economic and policy consulting firm in Baltimore, that looked at four scenarios for economic development on the Eastalco property, including green manufacturing jobs. If the zoning is not changed, that development could collectively support close to 4,000 jobs and generate nearly \$13 million in annual tax revenues, according to the study.

The Frederick County Office of Economic Development and the Frederick County Chamber of Commerce are among those supporting Alcoa. Both have submitted letters and testimony to the Planning Commission and the Frederick County Division of Planning recommending that Eastalco's zoning remain intact.

Also supporting Alcoa is Audrey L. Wolfe, chairwoman of the Planning Commission, who said she hopes for further discussion on the issue with her fellow commissioners.

"There is no land left for business to expand and grow," Wolfe said, adding that Eastalco's location is the perfect place for economic development with its rail spur.

The Planning Commission last week approved its recommendations, which did not include any changes at Eastalco, according to James A. Gugel, chief of comprehensive planning for the county's planning division.

"The area surrounding the Eastalco plant is one of the bigger blocks of prime farmland soils in the county," Gugel said.

Such soils are also found in five areas that the county has designated as priority preservation areas. Those properties are in the Middletown Valley and near Mount Airy and Walkersville.

Carpenter
www.jimnesshandyman.com

MHIC#Lic & Insured... [More](#)
[See All Featured Ads](#)

The state requires priority preservation areas for counties with certified agricultural preservation programs, Gugel said in an e-mail. White said he wants to preserve farmland for possible future use.

Even with proposed changes, the Eastalco land could still accommodate additional economic development, Gugel said, and he was quick to point out that only land usage, not zoning, is under review.

"It certainly doesn't completely close off the opportunities [Eastalco] would have to bring in other industrial uses," Gugel said of the recommended changes, while acknowledging that they would scale back those opportunities.

The county commissioners are to consider the recommendations during the first of several workshops next month, when they will prepare their draft plan, including a draft zoning map, Gugel said.

RESOURCES

[About us](#)

[Advertise](#)

[Contact us](#)

[Gazette jobs](#)

[Nonprofits](#)

[Montgomery](#)

[Frederick](#)

[Prince George's](#)

Copyright © 2009 Post-Newsweek Media, Inc./Gazette.Net

[Contact Us](#) | [About Us](#) | [Privacy Policy](#) | [FAQ](#) | [E-Letters](#) | [Place Classified Ad](#) |

The Gazette | 9030 Comprint Court | Gaithersburg, MD 20877 | main number: 301-670-2565, classifieds: 301-670-2500